

Radix

Coming of Age

McGill Chaplaincy



February 2004

Editor's Message

A small tattoo on the forehead, a solitary vision quest into the Canadian wilderness, the symbolic gift of a pendant (or a weapon), a birthday party, a body piercing, a meal of symbolic foods, a solemn religious ceremony ... these and a plethora of other rites exist to celebrate an individual's "coming of age." This issue of the Radix explores those moments in life when a new level of maturity is reached; when a child is welcomed (or thrust) into fledgling adulthood. These moments can be brought on by a physical sign like a girl's first menstrual period, such as the beautiful puberty celebration rites in Ghana. They can also be brought on by an internal motivator, unrelated to age, such as adult baptism in Evangelical Protestant traditions. They can be prominent and official, such as Bar/Bat Mitzvah for Jewish adolescents. They can also be personal and imperceptible to others, such as the moment when a Buddhist achieves enlightenment. They can even be as nondescript and inexplicable as the day I realized I hadn't looked at my sticker collection in over two weeks, and just didn't think I felt like it anymore. The following pages reveal how McGill students of various faiths interpret "coming of age," both physically and spiritually, and also how "coming of age" can be a collective metaphor for positive societal evolution. Enjoy!

~Sara Parks Ricker
editor

the Radix is: Sara Parks Ricker editor & Esha Bhandari: Hinduism & Loren Carle: Protestantism & Rachel Charlop-Powers: Religious Studies / Judaism & Laura Gallo: Agnosticism & Nina Kim: Catholicism & Bruno Mastronardi: Wicca & Indi Samarajiva (cover design) / Buddhism & Rabia Tahir: Islam & YOUR NAME HERE: your faith perspective (we are seeking a Sikh, for instance.....) e-communicate with US at radix@yours.com...

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Our cover is made up of samples. The foreground is Bouguereau's "Madonna & Child with St. John the Baptist." The background is a photo of the Circumcision Room from the Ottoman Topkapi, in Istanbul. The Star of David on the wall reminds me that Islam, Judaism, and Christianity are all children of Abraham. Siblings.

~Indi Samarajiva, cover artist

The Radix is proud to use recycled paper. Please continue this trend by rereading, reusing, and/or recycling.

March's theme is "**Religion and the Arts**" (deadline March 10th). We welcome submissions of all kinds from McGill students of all faith backgrounds. Please make articles about 500 - 600 words in length and images accessible in greyscale.

Email: radix@yours.com

Coming of Agenostic

"There is no faith without doubt; there is no doubt without faith" ~Paul Tillich"

"People who doubt can have great faith because faith is something you do, not something you think. In fact, the greater your doubt the more heroic your faith." ~Unknown

"I respect faith, but doubt is what gets you an education." ~Wilson Mizner

"I would rather have a mind opened by wonder than one closed by belief." ~Gerry Spence

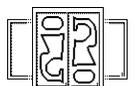
Most of us are brought up with the beliefs of our parents and, as children, we absorb them unthinkingly. But as our minds eventually develop independently we have the opportunity to reflect on these beliefs and decide where they belong in our lives, if at all. I don't remember exactly when, but a few years ago I did just that. And since then, I have been perpetually confused. My decision on the faith issue is that I am undecided! I fall under the question-mark category: Agnostic. That's right; I am a fence-sitter. I think at some point or another we are all agnostic about something, and it is at that instant that we have reached maturity. That point in our lives when we begin to think for ourselves and make our own decisions truly marks the passage into adulthood, regardless of age, gender, race or religion. You know you have entered this daunting stage when you begin to question things you never before thought questionable. Like, what does Santa Claus have to do with Christianity?

Agnosticism can be interpreted as a rite of passage because when you first start thinking for yourself, things are not quite as certain as they seemed before. I mean if your parents lied to you about Santa for all those years, what else should you be wary of? Along with uncertainty, there is, of course, doubt. For some people this period of doubt may last for a fleeting moment, for others a year or two, and for some ultra-skeptics like myself, maybe even a lifetime. A lifetime of confusion? Most of us cringe at the thought. With all the pressure upon us to find our way and make important decisions about our lives, there is little time to drift around in the confusion.

The problem is that people who are indecisive are generally looked down upon. According to Dante, the worst place in hell is reserved for skeptics like me! But why? Haven't the weighing of options, the critical eye, and the untrusting mind always been a sign of maturity? One of the first things our parents teach us is not to trust everybody and not to believe everything we hear. Then at school we are taught to "think critically" and question the so-called facts of history textbooks and the like. The state of uncertainty is simply misunderstood. Whether you are questioning your wants, your hopes, your beliefs, or even your gender, it is valuable to do so. How else can you hope to arrive at an answer?

Questions, answered or unanswered open many doors, one of which leads into adulthood. So enjoy your agnostic moments; they may be more important than you think.

~Laura Gallo
Confused and lovin' it



Age Rituals: the Importance of Timing

Before I begin, let me give my definition of an age ritual. Setting tradition aside, age rituals such as a Confirmation or a Bar Mitzvah are ceremonies that introduce a child into a religion. They are processes through which a child becomes a full member of a religious community, with all its rights and obligations. One therefore gives an oath to respect and comply with his or her religion. From a religious point of view, these rituals are important to the survival and growth of a religion. Children should be taught what it means to be of a certain faith; they should understand the meaning of spiritual devotion with all its implications. In a sense, being a member of a religion is like being a citizen of a country. One should be fully aware of his or her responsibilities.

My argument will not in any way go against religious age rituals; I fully respect their practice and find them necessary. What I have a problem with is the "age" part of the age rituals. There is a reason why one can vote and enlist in the army only at the age of eighteen. Fighting for one's country and participating in its politics demand some maturity. The same goes for religion. Although our new age brought many technological advancements and scientific discoveries, children are becoming less and less mature. Boys of ten or even thirteen only want to hear about sports and computer games, while girls are still playing with their Barbies. It is absurd to think that a ten-year-old product of our society is ready for any sort of commitment or responsibility.

Times have changed. Seven or eight hundred years ago in western Europe a ten-year-old Christian would have probably watched a couple of siblings die before the age of five, been the victim of warfare, famine or plague, and (if he or she had survived) would have been married by the age of fourteen. A thirteen-year-old Jew could witness pogroms and deportations. It is obvious that extreme life conditions make one mature faster. I am certain that a Jewish boy at his bar mitzvah *fully* understood all the implications that come with being Jewish. It is clear that children matured much faster during the middle ages and beyond. Even uneducated people understood that life could end at any moment and that faith might be the only saviour.

In our time, a religious means a big party and lots of preening to have my bat mitzvah not n't old or mature enough, but many friends to invite. Age ritual meaning not because religious (which it certainly did), but pletely immature and inexperienced religious oath when they are its full implications. If we meaning of age rituals, our religious our changing society. How about moving that age a bit higher? Fifteen? Eighteen? Twenty?

There is a huge problem with my argument. Religious age rituals, in our times, have little to do with religion. They are traditions that communities have kept to preserve their religious heritage. Tradition is strongly linked to religion. They are sometimes impossible to separate. But tradition is much more human and tangible than the concept of spiritual faith. This means that people hold on to their traditions with great rigour. It also means that children at the age of ten, twelve, or thirteen will be making traditional promises to confirm their spiritual beliefs. Age rituals will never change and are here to stay.

~Natalya Demberg

Natalya is a UI management student concentrating in strategic management with a minor in economics. She was born Jewish, but likes to believe that faith is indefinable.



Happy Birthday, Glendon

The most I ever learned about God, I learned from a little boy named Glendon Murphy. Glendon has cerebral palsy. He is eleven years old but he cannot walk, talk, see or hardly move on his own. It's amazing that such a tiny and helpless person could have given me this much. I'll never be able to perfectly describe exactly what it is that makes Glendon so special. I know that he has shown me that the most important things *aren't* a lot of *things*. And that love and life might not always be as complicated as they seem. Maybe Glendon has shown me that God really isn't that far away at all. I'm not sure, but I do know that every time I think about Glendon I either light up and smile because I love him or I cry because I love him and I miss him.

I want to tell you a story about Glendon's tenth birthday. I like to tell stories about Glendon. It makes me smile and light up. If you knew Glendon, you'd smile and light up too.

For many children, birthdays are full of anticipation, excitement and the expectation that at least some of their wishes will be fulfilled. Parents serve Kraft Dinner, pizza, cake and pop without the worry that the birthday boy or girl may not be getting the proper daily requirements of vegetables. Meticulously, as though tiptoeing on a tightrope, they plan the perfect party, consulting their child to determine important details like treat bag prizes, games, streamer colours... Let me say that no such preparation took place for Glendon's birthday celebration.

Glendon had been staying with my family for the weekend. As we were taking Glendon through the various exciting events of his day - likely many baths, springtime walks and playing an electronic keyboard with his head - we reminded him that that night we were going to have a yummy dinner with a special cake because Glendon was the birthday boy today.

Most days Glendon is very animated, alert and vocal. On these days Glendon would respond to the mention of a cake or most other things with enthusiastic squeals of delight. The day of the birthday cake, however, Glendon seemed to have entered his own little world. He was subdued, quiet and had nearly reached the pinnacle of relaxation and mellowness. At suppertime, he calmly ate his meal looking dazed and dreamy. The time came for dessert; a birthday pumpkin pie. Exuberantly, my parents and I provided a rousing rendition of happy birthday to Glendon. Glendon remained in his faraway state. Oh well, this time it was more for the big people than for the birthday boy. My dad held the pie up closer to Glendon's face, about to help him blow out the candle. Suddenly Glendon came alive. He lit up and laughed - a precious and adorable sight. "Yes this is fabulous," he was thinking. "Candles on a cake. For me. Happy birthday to me."

Happy birthday to you Glendon, and thank you. Thank you so much for reminding me that life is indeed precious and wonderful and fabulous. We can smile about it because we have each other, each one of us, who, when we are shown our true light, can shine and radiate into something more beautiful than I can describe.

~Erica Schmidt

Erica is at the empowering stage of U0 in her university career. She plans to focus in English literature and Religious Studies. Erica is Christian non-fundamentalist and believes that "Jesus is a way" that works well for her.



Physical Maturity = Spiritual Maturity?

Many religions traditionally celebrate the transition from childhood to adulthood - Confirmation for Catholics or Bar Mitzvah in Judaism. This is done when a child has passed puberty or is considered physically capable of bearing a child, often at the age of 14. At that point in time, parents accept the fact that as their child is physically mature, s/he is also psychologically and spiritually mature - ready to take responsibility as an adult. The question is: does physical maturity mean spiritual and mental maturity?

For Confirmation, unlike Baptism, young Catholics are given the right to choose their own Confirmation names. On the other hand, for Baptism, their parents choose it for them. This means that for Confirmation they are ready to take responsibility for their own actions. However, according to the law in most countries, a person is "legally" considered ready to take responsibilities such as participating in elections at the age of 18. Thus, in society, we are given legal responsibilities at the age of 18, not as early as 14. At the age of 14, we are still represented by our parents. We are not allowed to travel overseas alone without our parents or their approval for example. Can we take responsibility as an adult without being given the responsibilities an adult has? Just because we are physically mature at age 14 does not necessarily mean that we have and can take on adult responsibilities.

The purpose of the Confirmation is to "prepare" and "bless" the soul for the obstacles ahead and not necessarily to "mature" the soul. It means that a person is considered spiritually mature enough to be given the blessings to deal with the obstacles ahead. A person is considered mentally mature after having experienced how to handle obstacles with his or her own faith. Being in a state where one is prepared does not automatically classify him or her as mentally mature. Analogically, just because we are prepared to handle our own first problem does not imply that we are experienced in handling problems.

Thus, in the Confirmation, when a person is physically mature, s/he may not be mentally and spiritually mature. However, the Confirmation is always held prior to marriage. It is considered as a baby step towards greater responsibilities one will carry in a marriage. If this is the case then if we were to go back to the Middle Ages when women got married at the age of 13 or 14, would the Confirmation still be given at age 14 or earlier? The idea that a person is spiritually mature at the same time when he or she is physically mature is merely a tradition. It is not always true. Certain people have to take responsibilities early in life while others don't.

~Irene Setiawinata

Irene is an Economics major in U2.

Her favourite quote: "Maturity is achieved through an immensity of struggle."



Ferry Ride to Intuitive Knowing

When I think about "coming of age," I do not think of it in its literal sense, as my spiritual growth and development have had little to do with my chronological age. For me, coming of age has meant entering a new phase in my life that separates ignorance from knowledge, randomness from direction, and thoughtlessness from consciousness. The idea of coming of age is not something that happens in an instant, but is rather like the seed from which all else grows. Coming of age can for some be marked by a public ceremony, but it can also be something much smaller and more intimate, like waking up one morning with a grand realization.

Being a spiritual rather than "religious" person, I have naturally experienced a sort of coming of age in the form not so much of a grand realization, but more in the form of an intuitive knowing. This first seed of knowing was planted in March of 2002, while in my first year at McGill. My boyfriend at the time had, the year previous, been to a place called an "ashram" in the Kootenay region of British Columbia. Although I had a general idea of on its context or roots - all I knew was one's self." In March 2002, he suggested month, and, of course, I said that no, we to BC, I wanted to take summer courses, I stopped fighting it, I realized that telling me that I needed to go. And so I

The teachings at the ashram are centred on selflessness, love, surrenme) make life worth living. Being at the myself and about the Divine. I learned emotions. I learned the joy of giving spiritually full and being OK wherever I am and no matter what happens. I learned about the power I have to change my life and my outlook on it. I learned about the importance of balance between solitude and community, between control and freedom, between giving and taking. Certainly, I don't consider myself to be free from the harsh realities brought on by life. However, I do consider myself to be armed with the tools necessary to navigate with clarity and passion through the turbulence.

As the ashram is located in a rather remote area of BC, one must take a ferry in order to reach it. I distinctly remember the ferry ride to the ashram for the first time as being indicative of a crossing of sorts, which would lead me in an entirely new direction in my life. "Ashram" is a Sanskrit word meaning "spiritual home." The ferry was taking me to my spiritual home in order to begin my process of coming of age.



what an ashram was, I still was not very clear that it was a place one went in order to "find that we go to this ashram together for a couldn't; because I need a job, I can't just go what will I do with my cat, etc, etc, etc. After something very powerful inside of me was went.

rooted in Hindu and Buddhist philosophy and der, awareness, and all the qualities that (for ashram for a month, I learned so much about that I could control my actions, reactions, and without receiving. I learned about being

~Monica Farrell

Monica is in her 3rd year of Anthropology and World Religions and enjoys mentally planning future trips to the ashram.



(Visual) Book Review

When Prince Siddhattha came of age, he was married to a beautiful princess named Yasodhara.



I am rich and powerful and yet I am not at peace. I wonder what life is like beyond these palace walls...



Channa, my faithful servant, take me into Kapilavatthu! Very good, sire!



Look at that poor creature! She's just old!



A little further on... Stop! What's wrong with him?



However healthy we are now, we're all bound to get sick sooner or later!



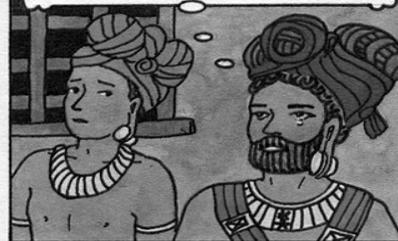
What a crowd! I think it's a funeral. Let's take a look.



Death comes to everyone, sire!



Old age, sickness, death... I never realised there was such suffering until today!



Cheer up, sir, these things are just part of life!



Why is he dressed like that?



He's a wandering monk searching for the Truth. If you ask me, no one will ever find it!



to be continued...

~ collage by Indi Samarajiva

The above is a collection of excerpts from "Buddha and His Friends" by S. Dhammika and Susan Harmer. Other books by them (but not this book) are available at www.timesone.com.sg/te. If anyone really wants this book, contact cchong@tpg.com.my. The book is published in Singapore and I bought it in Sri Lanka. ~Indi.

Forgive and Serve: A Quaker's Quest for Spiritual Maturity

What does spiritual coming-of-age represent for me? As I have been mulling over this concept the last couple of days, I realize that I spiritually come of age each time I "speak my truth" and express what I truly feel. For a person who has traditionally kept silent, expressing one's truth is tremendously liberating, especially in a spiritual context. Let me give you an example.

For some time I have been extremely ambivalent about my involvement with a certain faith community that contains an amazing range of people, but holds conservative views on a number of issues that I simply don't share. Socially and culturally it is very satisfying, but spiritually it is an ethical minefield. Their study groups for learning the faith are very pedantic - spiritual questioning is not encouraged. However, there is a considerable degree of pressure to attend and one night I found myself in a study group learning spiritual principles in a way that felt alien and imposed from the top down to me. What surprised me is that I spoke out and expressed exactly how I felt about the methodology - how it left me cold and was not how I preferred to advance spiritually. I knew this time I had to be honest and not continue with something that did not nourish me spiritually - and worse, felt like an obligation. The next day I felt an incredible sensation of lightness - the weight of guilt being lifted from me. What for others might come naturally - speaking their truth - for me results in great internal struggle. I therefore come of age spiritually each time I draw up the courage to express how I feel directly, despite fearing I might risk the approval or esteem of the people involved.

Translating one's spiritual principles into practice also represents a coming of age - a recognition of spiritual maturity. One such principle (forgiveness) is something I have especially struggled with. Knowing intellectually that forgiveness works is not the same as actually doing it. I read about the healing effects of forgiveness for years before I could actually take the leap and begin to soften my heart towards a long-term enemy. I was so accustomed to finding faults and dwelling on past offences, that my heart had shut down to the possibility of reconciliation. But the weight of carrying all this anger and bitterness was just not sustainable. And so one day I decided to start to build a friendship through email - a process that is slowly blossoming. It is still amazing to see this person's name in my in-box, after so many years of silence. Half of prayer is action. Without spiritual action, our prayer can easily wilt and die, despite the best intentions.

Another key area for spiritual coming of age is service to humanity. I have read so many accounts of people who have had spiritual breakthroughs through helping others, thinking of others, reaching out through activism, voluntary service, or the creative arts. Whenever my own problems press in on me, I know the best way out is to think of someone out there who needs my energy. It could be writing a card to a person or organization whose human rights are being threatened (one of Amnesty International's campaigns), or sending a few words of loving encouragement to a friend. It is a fundamental mark of spiritual maturity when one can move beyond oneself and connect to the wider world through service.

Spiritual coming of age for me is more of a feeling than a defining event. It is something that evolves over time, coming to greater and greater expression as we experience the vicissitudes of life. We go through stages, spiritual wisdom gradually revealing itself to us (as we get better at learning from our mistakes!). I have never had a dramatic conversion to any religion - for such people their conversion may represent their coming of age, as it is a spiritual rebirth.

I think we all come of age when we recognize ourselves as spiritual beings with a spiritual hunger, and embark on our various paths of learning. Our society likes to fix ages to certain achievements, but coming of age knows no such boundaries. We start our "coming of age" at the dawn of spiritual awareness, and continue our path until death begins a new age for us.

~Kathryn Lum
Quaker



Close One Eye and Open the Other

Turn on the news every evening and be spoon-fed conclusions about the world around us

Or...

View the world of reality with your own inner eyes and hear its melodies with your own discerning ears...

The call for global unity is audible from many directions. Society is changing at a rate never witnessed. The negative events during this period of international transition make news, make money, and therefore bombard our cognition. The positive dimensions of this change, seen only with the keen, inner eye, reveal an unparalleled openness to global concepts, movement towards international and regional collaboration, an inclination of warring parties to opt for peaceful solutions, and a search for spiritual values. Even the remotest regions of our planet are experiencing the rigorous effects of this vitalizing breeze as it ventilates the modes of thought of us all, renewing, clarifying and amplifying our perspectives in the wake of humanity's suffering and turmoil.

The situation in the world, while presenting us with an acute challenge of the utmost urgency, is witnessing a tremendous surge and a notable consolidation of forces working towards the world-wide development of a new World Order¹, the splendours of which we can scarcely imagine. For instance between 1990-1996, there was an unprecedented commitment to founding one global family, when the "big brothers" - the traditional world powers - invited to the family table their long-absent siblings from Zimbabwe, Iceland, Bolivia, and Nepal and said, "we'd like to hear what you think too." Among these "family gatherings" are the World Conference on Education for All in Thailand (1990), the World Summit for Children in New York (1990), the United Nations Conference on the Environment in Rio de Janeiro (1992), a desperate World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna (1993), the International Conference on Population in Cairo (1994), the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen (1995), and the particularly vibrant Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995). On 22-26 May 2000, representatives of over 1000 NGOs assembled in New York at the invitation of Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary-General. A portion of the statement emerging from this meeting reads as follows: "...we are one human family, in all our diversity, living on one common homeland and sharing a just, sustainable and peaceful world, guided by universal principles of democracy..."². A century ago, what gloriously unifying world events could we boast of? On the contrary, the mightiest nations were arming themselves for what played out as two World Wars. And the picture only bleakens as we go back in time. Perceive how far we have come in just 100 years, which - in a historical context - is a speck of time!

The long and bloody stages of infancy and childhood, through which the human race had to pass, have receded into the background. Humanity is now experiencing the emotions (as seen in intense inward and outward exploration, commotions, daily strifes and ruinous wars) invariably associated with the most turbulent stage of its evolution; the stage of adolescence, when the impetuosity of youth and its vehemence reach their climax. This phase will gradually be superseded by the calmness, the wisdom, and the unity in diversity that characterize the stage of adulthood. Then will the human race reach that realm of ripeness and taste that fair fruit of maturity favourably fermented by spirituality which will enable it to acquire all the powers and capacities upon which its ultimate development and advancement depend - in short, humanity's coming of age!

If you cannot see this my friend, close one eye to that decaying old world and open the other to the beauty of this new one.

~Ali Farahani
Baha'i
World Citizen



1. Baha'u'llah. The Most Holy Book, K181, p. 85.

2. UN General Assembly, 54th session, Agenda Item 49 (b) UN Reform Measures and Proposals: the Millennium Assembly of the UN, 8 August 2000, (Document no. A/54/959), p.2.

Violent “Coming of Age” in India?

Comments and Critiques of the 2004 World Social Forum

Exploring the slogan “another world is possible,” over 80,000 people from all over the globe came to Mumbai, India this month for the fourth annual World Social Forum. Although the numbers seem impressive at first glance (the kind you'd expect to find at Times Square on New Years), there were surprisingly few residents of Mumbai (formerly known as Bombay) who were aware that the WSF was taking place in their very own city. Poor publicity? Perhaps, but more likely is the prospect that 80,000 people represent a relatively small gathering for a city of 16 million.

That being said, almost 75% of the 80,000 participants in this year's forum were from India, mostly representatives of the peasant-based “Dalits” movement. On the evening of January 16th the WSF opened its gates to over 2600 organizations from 132 countries. For the next five days over 1600 conferences, seminars, and workshops were held, most surrounding issues of social justice, human rights and the role of neo-liberal globalization in India and abroad.

Despite the stigma attached to such leftist events by “conservatives,” it should be noted that the World Social Forum is not merely a congregation of disgruntled, whiny activists, united for the sole purpose of bashing U.S. imperialism and corporate expansion. The WSF is an open space for meaningful debate and discussion; an arena where participants can propose practical alternatives for a more equitable system for communities and the world at large. There is, inevitably, a little U.S.-bashing as well. Nevertheless, the WSF remains an ideal place to forge personal and professional links and to unite like-minded social groups involved in similar struggles.

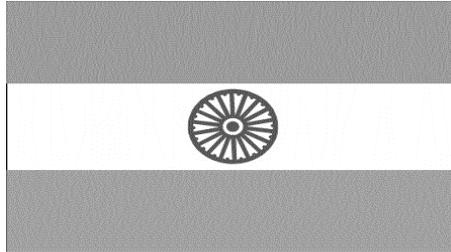
Encouraging communication among different socio-political movements was a big reason why this year's forum was moved to Mumbai. Based in Porto Alegre, Brazil for the last three years, the WSF intentionally settled in India, a nation currently containing a sixth of the global population. Symbolically, the venue was an abandoned turbine factory in the suburb of Goregaon, a site where 9000 employees were retrenched in the early 1990s. Many of these former workers, along with the unions that represented them, were in attendance to protest the effects of ruthless urban development in India. However, despite worker solidarity in this particular case, not all factions of India's “New Left” were in support of the World Social Forum.

In fact, the more radical and sectarian groups of India held their own counter-forum directly across the road! Entitled “Mumbai Resistance,” these groups were in total opposition to the WSF, discrediting the entire event because of funding it received from “impure” capitalist organizations like the Ford Fund, Oxfam and the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA). This is a perfect example of the ideological divisions that exist within both Indian and international social movements. Unfortunately, the mere existence of Mumbai Resistance at the WSF is only further proof that another world can never be possible until many of these leftist groups compromise their personal agendas and particular political views for the advancement of a popular, collective movement.

Okay, let's cross the street again and

come back to the World Social Forum, which was far more interesting on the whole. One of the main themes to resurface during the many seminars, lectures, and workshops, and the one that will be the focus of this article, was the spread of religious fundamentalism in India. After the Twin Tower attacks on September 11th, the term “religious fundamentalism” has become synonymous with Islamic extremism, at least in mainstream western media. However, religious fundamentalism has an entirely different meaning in an Indian context.

At both the federal and state level, the



Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has grown immensely popular in both rural and urban areas. Categorized as the nation's Hindu right-wing party, the BJP is currently in federal office as well as in several other states, including the state of Maharashtra (where Mumbai is situated). During several of the talks, including a poignant speech by Booker Prize winner Arundhati Roy, explicit testimonies were given of religious genocide in the state of Gujarat, only a few hours north. This horrific massacre, which received little international press coverage, took place on January 26th, 2001 (a date commonly celebrated throughout India as Republic Day). Over two thousand Islamic Indians were violently murdered in the streets of Gujarat, most notably in the capital city of Ahmedabad. Muslim women were gang raped and burned alive while local residents and the police force stood idle on the side of the road. According to several eye witnesses at the forum, militant Hindu community members were even given lists (provided by BJP members in Gujarat) of which homes and businesses belonged to Islamic families.

This atrocity, while perhaps the most shocking, is but one of many examples of rising Hindu fundamentalism, with a touch of intolerant fascism, in today's democratic India. The Gujarat massacre is also indicative of the deep-seated corruption that occurs at the level of governments and the judicial system. Although certain police officers and government officials were found implicated in the Gujarat genocide, no one to date has been tried or punished in the Indian courts. Moreover, none of the victims or their families has received any emotional support or financial compensation.

Hindu extremism is slowly replacing the secular, democratic constitution of India, which guarantees equality to all religions. The denial of religious equality is extended to other concepts of equal rights, which are branded as divisive, anti-national and foreign. As Indian intellectual Tanika Sarkar so eloquently stated at a WSF lecture on the 20th, “movements against issues like caste oppression are discredited by the BJP as a ploy to weaken Hindu unity against Muslims and foreign powers. Anti-poverty issues are projected as divisive for the

same reasons while gender justice is reprimanded as western feminism, one that seeks to destroy traditional Hindu values in the home and society.”

Sadly, Hindu devotionalism in India, which once mobilized for struggles of the weak against the strong, is today regimented within an order of obedience and submission. As movements begin to mobilize against the Hindu right in India, many Muslim communities continue to live in fear, wary of the upcoming federal elections in April and frightened at the possible impact of yet another six-year term in office for the BJP.

Without a doubt, the issue of Hindu fundamentalism, its political power, and the future of Indian democracy was the most interesting of all the topics addressed and debated during the World Social Forum.

After five days of overwhelming intellectual debate, festive dancing, lengthy documentary films, weaving through loud and energetic crowds and drinking lots of chai, I am exhausted. The forum was over-stimulating to all the senses. Although I learned a great deal about water privatization, HIV workers in Malaysia, and (of course) the rise of Hindu fundamentalism, the WSF presented me with far too much information to process. There were simply too many simultaneous lectures taking place to absorb even one to its fullest extent. Perhaps the largest downfall of the World Social Forum was the sheer magnitude of participants and issues to be addressed, many of which became diluted in a dark soup of leftist rhetoric and revolutionary banter.

Nevertheless, I understand the desire for global inclusion and the need to represent all of the social struggles that share common enemies and goals. Despite being over-saturated with information (which is not such a bad thing), I commend the organizers for creating a vibrant space to reflect and comment on the many aspects of social and political activism. It may have been my first experience at the World Social Forum but it certainly won't be the last. For all those who couldn't attend this year's in Mumbai, don't despair. It'll all be happening again this time next year when it returns to its roots in Porto Alegre, Brazil.

~ Alex Sabbag
See www.wsfindia.org
for more information
on the WSF



Come in from the cold!

Share a **HOT VEGAN LUNCH** at the **RABBIT HOLE CAFÉ**
3625 Aylmer, downstairs
Fridays, 12:30-2:00pm
Donations of \$1
or 1 non-perishable food item
are appreciated.



EMERGENCY FOOD SUPPORT

also available at

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

3625 Aylmer, 2nd floor

Fridays 1-5 pm

For more info

call 398-4886 or email

foodforthought@yellowdoor.org



**McGill Student
Parents' Network**

and Chaplaincy Service

offer support to

students who are parents:

informal childcare, babysitting, tutoring
and friendly visits to households.

Also monthly support group meetings
with activities for kids & social events.

Interested families please contact:

Phone: 514-398-4104

Email: simonetca@yahoo.com



Sikh Chaplaincy Open Meeting

Social get-togethers for Sikh students
Newman Centre, 3484 Peel



Contact Manjit Singh, Sikh Chaplain
at lo.man@sympatico.ca
697-3527

"Lunch and Learn"

Free bagels and discussion!

Monday 12:30: controversial issues with Rabbi Jackman
Thursday 1:30: weekly Torah Portion with Rabbi Plaskow



3460 Stanley Street (Hillel library)
Contact Rabbi Jackman for chat, questions,
or learning Jewish texts.
845-9171
email rabbi@hillel.ca

Alternative Vespers

"Creative Worship in Music and Word"

February 29

March 28

Montreal Diocesan College

3573 University

4:00 pm

Musical Director Loren Carle,
student in the McGill Faculty of Music

Phone 398-4104

Light vegetarian food following

New Earth Voices



Singing is good for the soul!

Last chance to join this term!

Our small choir rehearses Tuesdays

4:45—6:30 PM

*Sight-reading experience helpful,
but not always required.*

*Our music is varied,
the atmosphere friendly.*

Call McGill Chaplaincy for info: 398-4104

**The Yellow Door...
Volunteers needed!**

The Yellow Door Elderly Project is seeking volunteers to work with seniors living in and around the McGill Ghetto. No major time commitment required —flexible hours, just a couple of hours per month! Great opportunity to contribute to community spirit ...

If you would like to become a Yellow Door volunteer, call (514)398-6243 or email:
elderlyproject@hotmail.com

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

McGill Ecumenical Chaplaincy's

**St. Martha's
in the Basement**



Good food for Body and Soul

Please share our Bible Study, Worship and a Simple Vegetarian Supper Wednesdays at 6 pm in the basement of the United Theological College (3521 University) call Gwenda Wells for more info: 398-4104



Newman Centre

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

Roman Catholic Mass:

- Tuesday through Friday 4pm
- Saturday 5pm
- Sunday 11am
- (Saturday mass is followed by a community supper for only \$3.50)

Newman Student Society Presents:
a Coffee House!
February 14th at 8 PM.
Main floor of the Newman Centre

Student Nights at St. John's

Students, faculty and staff are welcome at monthly student nights

For more information, call Helmut at the Lutheran Chaplaincy: 398-4104 or

St. John's Lutheran Church:
844-6297
helmut.saabas@sympatico.ca

**Dinner & Discussions
for gay and lesbian young adults
(18 to 35)**

"exploring our faith from our perspective"
**every 1st & 3rd Tuesday of the month
7PM at Christ Church Cathedral**
For info, contact Rev. Joyce Sanchez
843-6577 or jsanchez@montreal.anglican.ca

Valentine's Day Tea
3PM February 14th

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