radix

January 2008

A magazine about you. Your beliefs, your roots, your guiding philosophy. This Issue:
CHRISTMAS HOPE * TIMKET * MILESTONES * A VERY 'HOLI' CELEBRATION
* HAPPINESS * EID AL-ADHA * THE LITTLE THINGS * CELEBRATIONS OF THE SOUL

WHAT DO YOU Celebrate?

Editors: Aileen Morrison and Isra Wani
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Special thanks to Chanel Kwok!

Photograph: Chanel Kwok

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Radix is produced *by* McGill students *for* McGill students, with support from McGill Chaplaincy Services.
The views expressed are those of our contributors and are not necessarily shared by Chaplaincy.

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Doubts

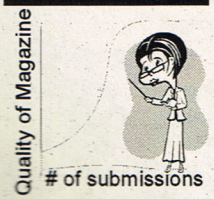
with beliefs come doubts. what do you doubt?

Anonymous entries and unrelated content welcome.

Send it in!
Radix wants to hear from you! Whatever your faith or non-faith perspective, send in your writing, blurbs, art, etc. Submissions are subject to editing for length, content, and style.

What is Radix?
McGill's an academic community, but we are also a group of people with personal beliefs, values, and unique outlooks on life. For those who want to, this is a forum to share these things.

SPECIAL RADIX



DEADLINE: JANUARY 31st
send to: radix@mail.mcgill.ca

CHRISTMAS HOPE

BY AILEEN

STARCHY white sheets thrown off in a rush of excitement, the realization: my stocking is waiting. My flat feet slap linoleum and pound hollow tones from slate flooring as I navigate three bending hallways. (In later years I will dream of the house long after it is sold, but in those distorted flashbacks it is a labyrinth, the work of a mad carpenter, with secret passageways and monstrous stone chambers.) On my right, a wall textured with grey triangular ribs will scrape an elbow easily; I steer clear. At last, I breach the threshold into the living room, braking so as to not make grandfather unnecessarily dizzy. There in the 1950s-esque, sun-filled room with rugs of all shapes and sizes, I cast a greedy glance at the payload in sight: red, fat stockings hung above the fireplace, a candy cane hooked on each. Arms crossed, my parents watch the festivities, sharing unspoken thoughts and giving off an air of smugness. My sister's eyes flash with impatience,

CELEBRATING TIMKET

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
KALI STULL

Mekelle, Ethiopia. The whole town dressed up and gathered to celebrate the baptism of Jesus.

It was wonderful to see the strength of belief in the healing power of the water and the festivities that lasted all day.

The priests blessed the fountain and people rushed to the holy water to be cleansed by drinking or bathing in it.

but her tone is playful: "We thought you were *never* gonna get up!"

The same experience repeated itself punctually every year, returning as if in some eternal cycle. Only later did I realize that pieces of it had been disappearing, bit by bit, like people secretly leaving a party. There were little things that faded gently, like my belief in Santa, and then there were bigger things. My Grandfather, whose stories, told through a shaky yet thunderous voice, had always ended in uproarious laughter, eventually succumbed to a neurodegenerative disease, which is perhaps ironic, since he was a neurologist himself.

Eventually, the Christmas of my childhood vanished completely. I guess childhood fades that way, piece by piece, strip by strip, some bits pulled off gently, and some with unexpected vigor. The worst part of it this year was feeling like the same might be true of my beliefs. Carrying this thought around with me after Christmas, I felt a bit hopeless.

Then, something amazing happened: A little cousin was born on the other side of the world. Looking at her picture, I was suddenly reawakened to the love that is intrinsic to creation. Whoever established a universe where after less then a year of being knit together by tiny molecular factors interacting in an infinitely complex procession of steps, a brand new being can stare back at me through the computer screen with curious eyes, is *big*. What do you know! The birth of a child brought hope and a new perspective. I guess that's the message of Christmas anyway, isn't it?

“No matter how much I seemed like a part of “the group” or this society, I could never actually be a part of it.”

Milestones

BY SANA SAEED

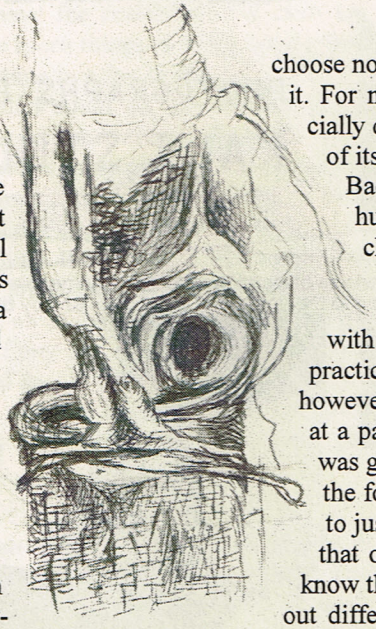


Illustration: Joy Ding

I've come to despise milestone celebrations. Not all of them, just the ones which affect me numerically. Turning Thirteen and Sixteen have been the only two which spawned excitement. Eighteen and Twenty, on the other hand, created nothing but grief and consistent nihilistic self doubt. (I promise I'm actually a jovial person and only express such depressing thoughts to get things published. You don't know Kafka for a brilliant exegesis on what gave him comfort and happiness in life, do you?)

The soundless depressions of Eighteen are related to the teenage need to fit in as well as my faith. The depressions of Twenty, on the other hand, have had more to do with allowing *Oil of Olay* and *Garnier* commercials propagating the preponderance of youth to take over my nightly thoughts. Oh, and my severe lack of direction in life. Yeah, that too. That's rather depressing. However, since I'm currently 20, I'm unable to give you the retrospective clarity I can give on my other ages. So, I'm just going to focus on the day I turned 18.

June 10th, 2005. Prom night. For under 220$ I was able to look like 300$. Yes, that's how good I looked. I was ready to dance the night away; solo, as always.

This was prom weekend, a legendary event. This would either be the best social event of your public education career or the worst. Who knew that for me, it would end up falling somewhere in between. The prom itself was magnificent, minus the cries of my best friend's recent ex. Dry grad (an alcohol-free carnival held for grads from 12 am until 6 am) was also a blast. Inebriated on Bawlz (an excellent energy drink), my friends and I enjoyed ourselves until the wee hours of Saturday. By 12 am on June 11th I had turned Eighteen in a limo, so I thought I'd enjoy the remnants of my immaturity before I was fully acknowledged as a legal adult. Good times, good times. So far, grad weekend and my birthday were turning out amazingly. I felt mature, happy, confident, and ready for more.

June 11th, Evening. I was invited to a grad party. It was supposed to be one of those epic high school parties, the kind at which crazy stuff happens, hilarious pictures are taken, and are later used to blackmail you when you enter a public career. Yeah, one of those. It was epic, but for entirely different reasons.

While I am a rather social person, I was never the sort to go to parties. A good time to me was watching movies with my best friends on a Friday night. It wasn't the actual watching of the film which was the fun part, but being in the company of humans I loved. Alcohol had not been a factor with us. I don't choose not to drink only because my faith, Islam, forbids it. For me, it's a stand against what I believe is a socially destructive drug. But that's a whole story in and of itself.

Back to what I was saying: My friends weren't huge on the drinking. At most, they'd drink champagne at weddings or a few sips of wine at dinner at that point, so I had not been exposed to actual drinking. I always felt comfortable with my friends, knowing we had this major social practice in common (for the most part). The party, however, was another thing. It was my first attendance at a party where alcohol would be present. I knew it was going to be there, but I didn't think of it as being the focus of the night. Again, I was looking forward to just some crazy fun. I don't know what I mean by that or even what I was exactly looking for—I just know that “crazy fun” was it. Things, however, turned out differently. After being there for about an hour, I noticed that the focus of the night was celebration via inebriation! I found myself confused and increasingly uncomfortable. I even remember getting into a discussion with a good friend over the merits of alcohol, or the severe lack thereof. I remember the stench of alcohol and the reek of decreasing sobriety. I remember being offered again and again various alcohols. People didn't seem to believe that I didn't drink.

“But, you're so wild …how and why do you stay sober? Wait, are you even sober or just drunk and kidding around?”

After a few hours, I ran around the house to find my best friend and asked her to drive me home. An epiphany had struck, and I struggled to quickly recover from its blow. I couldn't. The salty waters (a clever way of saying tears) gushed out within seconds of entering her van.

I realized something that night, something which I know is not with me alone. No matter how much I seemed like a part of “the group” or this society, I could never actually be a part of it. It wasn't my faith which was an impediment, but the way this culture conditioned its followers. By saying “no thanks, I don't drink” about 67 times that night, a wall had been created between myself and my peers. I had become marked. I was that designated driver (without even a learner's) for life. I sat in that car, and cried.

Every teen wants to fit in, and I was no different. When I finally felt like I did fit in, I was quickly reminded that I never could. But it's not really a bad thing; I've gotten over it for the most part and have learned to overcome the constructed barriers.

It just sucks when you realize that on your birthday.

a very 'HOLI' celebration

> "Why can't the world be this fun all the time?"

Can you imagine anything more fun than a day of throwing water and coloured powder at random people in the streets? Well if you can, I suggest you head over to India this spring during the festival of 'Holi'—you will surely change your mind.

The Hindu festival of Holi, which takes places in early March each year on the first full moon of spring, is a veritable 'total war'—of colour. Holi commemorates the fight between Lord Vishnu and Hiranyakashipu in Hindu mythology, as well as the onset of spring, the season of love for Hindus. It is also the wildest, funnest, and most off the hook celebration I've ever been privy to.

My experience of Holi occurred early last year in Mumbai (formerly Bombay), India's largest city and one of the most densely packed urban areas on the planet. With festivities taking place in all public areas, including busy streets and parks, no one could escape the rain of colour that blanketed the city. Not that anyone wanted to. From enthusiastic young children to adults letting loose, it seemed as though absolutely everyone in the city was armed with colour, and poised to strike.

The best strategy during Holi is to form into a makeshift mob, patrol the streets, and get into confrontations with other marauding gangs wherever possible. On every street corner there are vendors with bags of coloured powder to ensure everyone is well equipped, and water tankers will often stop on the side of the street and give everyone a good shower. The day is simultaneously celebrated with vibrant processions accompanied by traditional dancing and music.

In one particular moment I remember hauling a coloured water-bomb across the main road in downtown Mumbai at a bunch of random strangers at a bus-stop, a normal thing to do on Holi, and thinking to myself, "Why can't the world be this fun all the time?"

Towards the end of the day, with everyone well-smattered in colour, you could barely recognize anyone. Amongst other things, Holi is a great equalizer, a day where everyone participates as an equal regardless of caste or other divisions in Indian society.

I think Canadians can learn a lot from Holi, both from its equalizing force and its commitment to abandoned fun, two things Western celebrations often lack. In this spirit I declare an all-out colour snow fight in Montreal next snowfall. Who's with me?

Revelers enjoy high spirits during the Hindu festival of Holi. (Note: *Crayons may be needed to get full effect of photos.*)

Photographs: Benjamin Holzman and Erin Beser

Keep an eye out for the Holi event to be held by the Hindu Students Association in the coming soon! (Holi is February 21st this year.)

BY BENJAMIN EZEKIEL HOLZMAN

HAPPINESS

BY C. M.

THERE'S been a question on my mind that's caused me anxiety over the past several months. It prevents me from sleeping some nights and returns each time I'm sitting on the couch thinking there's nothing to do: Why aren't we happy? Why are those of us who you'd expect to be happy—healthy young people living in a safe country with no want of food and with many interests and with religious and spiritual inclination—still miserable, or worse, bored?

I do not mean this as any form of a "you should appreciate what you have because others have it worse" lecture. It goes beyond this.

There are so many sources of joy in life. Working at a job one finds interesting or productive, having a good meal with friends or laughing with family, watching a good movie. Finding time to work on a favorite hobby or playing an instrument. Some find joy in religion—looking forward to a paradise, working towards enlightenment. Some find it in spirituality.

With all of these things to bring us joy shouldn't we all be living great lives? I'm not claiming that all of us can live what we imagine to be dream lives, but it seems a terrible tragedy that many of us live miserably when happiness is so easy. All of us, maybe excepting those in the very worst physical pain or mental anguish, have the resources—I'd even say we have more things to bring us joy than there is time in a day to do.

If all I could do, for the rest of my life was to read classic literature view good movies, play pick-up football, listen to jazz music, cook haute cuisine, or even work all day at a job that I found interesting, I think that I would be happy. But I'm not limited to any one of these things. I can do all of them and more. And if I get bored of any one of these, I can find new things to do.

So why are lives like mine not filled with joy? Why are we not constantly doing the things that we enjoy? Why is it that instead of deciding which great lives to live we often live without pleasure, existing for the sake of existing?

This has been on my mind recently, and it causes me plenty of stress and even anger. But I like the anger, because sometimes it's the anger that brings me to be engaged with life and to see this joy that I'm spiteful of missing. Sometimes walking along a street I'll stop and see the beauty of nearly anything and realize the potential that I've been given as a human being.

So why aren't we happy? Perhaps the answer has to do with brain chemistry. Or human psychology. Or theology or philosophy. Maybe it is just poor time organization. I have no idea. I won't pretend to give some revolutionary answer because I don't have any answer. I wish I did. Despite being troubled with the issue for months, I'm still at a primitive stage in figuring it out. But I'm raising this issue to inform rather than depress. Maybe you can find the answer.

EID

BY ISRA WANI

SO it was Eid al-Adha, one of two major annual Muslim festivals, a few weeks ago. 20th December to be exact. It is supposed to be a big day, a big celebration. At home, there are many rituals that characterize the day, from the seemingly simple if not trivial, like wishing all family members the cursory "Eid Mubarak!" with hugs and kisses all around as soon as you wake up, to the more profound emphasis on prayer and the lessons of sacrifice and submission to God that the festival commemorates. But for the first time, I was not at home on Eid. Worse, it was still finals season. Luckily I was done with exams but most of my friends either were not, or had already left the city. All day that day, I kept having to tell myself that it was Eid, to make myself feel joyous, and to convince myself of the special spirituality of the day. But I felt no sincere or authentic sense of celebration, or even a sense that the day was different from any other. I realized that it is not a date on the calendar that makes a celebration - it is having people to share the joys and the rituals and the stories with. My attempts to embrace the day and purposely construct a meaning for it failed...because I lacked the most fundamental, the most valuable ingredients - family and friends, the simple yet irreplacable catalysts that can transform an ordinary day into a celebration.

LITTLE THINGS

BY EMILY MILLER

AS another holiday season arrives, I take the time to reflect on what it means to me. I celebrate Christmas. My family is Catholic, but I'm not. I don't know what I believe religiously. All I know is that I love Christmas.

I celebrate snow and all that it symbolizes: a new beginning. I wait patiently for the first snowfall, to catch snowflakes on my tongue, make snowmen, and throw the occasional snowball. I celebrate relationships and the people I take for granted everyday, like the person at Starbucks who makes my coffee for me or the cashier at the grocery store. Although my Christmas Eve toast tends to include a "Happy Birthday baby Jesus!", I don't celebrate him. I celebrate good food and the time it takes to prepare. I celebrate nature; the smell of a freshly cut Christmas tree. I buy and make meaningful yet useful gifts for my family and friends, and I celebrate the joy they get from those gifts and the joy this brings me.

During the holidays, I enjoy curling up with a good book and peppermint hot chocolate; I celebrate relaxing and time to myself. Exams may stress me out, but I celebrate how much I've accomplished in the past term.

The holiday season is a time to take a step back and look at everything you have in your life. Starting with thanksgiving, I reflect on why I'm thankful for everything I have, and then I celebrate each. The season moves slowly for me; each day seems to pass in the perfect amount of time. Weather and stress don't put a damper on my joy, because I celebrate them too.

Have you ever taken the time to just say "Merry Christmas" or "Happy Holidays" to random people as you walk through your life in the holiday season? Whether it's just someone you held the door for, or the delivery person who brings your groceries or late night pizza? To see the smile and the happiness it brings them is enough; It's the little things that should be celebrated.

CELEBRATIONS OF THE SOUL

ANONYMOUS

Illustration: Joy Ding

To celebrate is to rejoice and give thanks for what has made life sweet, usually by feasting and drinking with one's friends and relatives. When I think about what I truly celebrated over the holidays this year, I can honestly say that it wasn't the turkey (I am vegetarian!), the overabundance of chocolate, the pretty lights, the many socks (however useful and fluffy), or the manicure kits and beauty creams that I received Christmas day.

I'll never deny that such things are blessings to be thankful for, or that the event of sharing affectionate gifts with my loved ones was worthy of a celebration all its own. I am grateful for all the earthly goods and wonderful relationships that make my stay here a happy one, and I delight in them. In retrospect, however, I realize that I enjoyed the most significant part of my holidays on Christmas Eve. I don't mean Reveillion at midnight with wine and meat pies -- I don't consume either anymore!

I have been studying the Raja Yoga of Self-Realization Fellowship for four years now. I am not a Catholic but I went to the ten o'clock Christmas Eve mass to hear my mother sing in the choir. Sitting down and standing up with everyone else, reveling in the festive mood, I was suddenly reminded of why every house of Spirit is sacred to me these days. All religious buildings feel hallowed when God attends with you.

As this is the season for sharing, I fearfully admit that during the sermon and lovely Christmas hymns, our sweet and indulgent Lord took it upon Himself to fill my little mind with a stunning sense of His heavenly greatness, charging me and the whole night around me with His magnificent divinity. When I got home and meditated, thanking Him inadequately for His awesome company, He went on to show me gently sparkling glimpses of celestial treasure, complete with starry gems and shining gold, all woven together in a splendor of intricate patterns. It was a glittering party behind my eyelids, drawn in multicolored ethereal light, and could have made a jewelry store look poor!

As outrageous as my yuletide tale may sound, I was sober in every way (have been about three years now) and no one could have been more surprised than me! I didn't anticipate anything over the holidays from God and I still don't quite understand the meaning of the divine "bling-bling" display. Reflecting on it, I am certain of only one thing: what I treasure and rejoice about above all during our jolliest of seasons.

I confess that my holidays really began on November 29th. That day, as on every 29th of November for the past three years, I bought flowers and put them in my room. My puzzled parents could only shrug. The occasion? To celebrate the night our God spoke His first words to me, making Himself a special place in my life and me into an awkwardly sprouting mystic. I celebrate each syllable God has since uttered to me at every opportunity I find.

I don't think the holidays will end around here, because every time God shows that immense, glorious face of His (there is no other description of it!), He is like a festival in my soul, lifting my heart with heavenly joy, humbling me with a deep feeling of what Holiness really is. Had He not touched me, "holy" would have remained just another empty word to me. For every expression of our God's unexpected friendship, what can I do, but celebrate on and on?

Grandmother

Come sit down next to me
and tell me about your day.
Would you like a cup of tea?
I know that Lady Grey is your favourite,
Careful now, it's hot.

I'll teach you how to use your computer,
How to turn on your new cell phone,
And you can tell me
How much times have changed.

In a little while we can go for a walk
Past all the Christmas trees
framed by living room windows
That twinkle and reflect onto the snow

When our fingers and noses turn
bright red with the cold
We can come back home,
And warm our toes by the fire.

— *Sara Reid*

Newman Centre

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

Did you know that
Roman Catholic Mass
is held conveniently
on campus
several times per week?
Contact the Newman Cen-

The Muslim Students Association of McGill

We offer: weekly study circles, free Islamic educational materials, Ramadan services, lectures/conferences, library (Shatner building, room 430)

3460 McTavish Street, Rm. 14
ssmu.mcgill.ca/msa
msamcgill@montrealmuslims.ca

Unitarians Unite!

Meetings every other Thurs.

Contact Curtis Murphy for details.
curtis.murphy@mail.mcgill.ca

The Montreal Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

welcomes all for silent worship at 11 am every Sunday at the Greene Centre in Westmount (1090 Greene).
Directions are on our website.
http://montreal.quaker.ca

St. Martha's in the Basement

McGill Ecumenical Chaplaincy's St. Martha's shares a weekly informal worship and discussion, followed by a vegetarian supper. It is a welcoming place to form meaningful friendships, explore faith in an inclusive way, and bring sacredness to our lives. Friends of Christians very welcome.

Wednesdays at 6pm in the basement of the United Theological College, 3521 University.
For details call: Gwenda Wells at 398-4104.

JOIN STUDENTS AND STAFF OF THE
UNITED THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE
(OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA)
FOR WORSHIP AND FELLOWSHIP EACH WED.
BEGINS AT 11:45 AM
3521 UNIVERSITY STREET

Want fair-traded/fair-priced coffee, or warm, fresh-of-the-day muffins and pastries? Support the

architecture cafe

from becoming yet another overpriced campus cafeteria. Located on the lower level of the Macdonald-Harrington Building in Room G6. Join "Save Architecture Cafe" on Facebook.

McGill Student Parents' Network

The MSPN provides support to McGill students who are parents.

Regularly we offer free of charge to McGill students: in-home babysitting, support group meetings, study sessions for parents with babysitting for children.

Interested families should contact the MSPN coordinator at

mcgillspn@gmail.com
— or at (514) 398-4104

Sikh Chaplaincy Open Meeting

Social get-togethers
Newman Centre, 3484 Peel
Contact Manjit Singh, Chaplain
manjit.singh@mcgill.ca

Share a **HOT VEGAN LUNCH** at the

RABBIT HOLE CAFÉ,

a Collective Vegetarian Kitchen
3625 Aylmer, downstairs
Fridays, 1-4 pm
Donations of $1 or
a non-perishable food item
are appreciated.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Food depot and nutritional tips and support.
3625 Aylmer, 1st floor
Fridays, 1-5 pm
Email: food4thought.yd@gmail.com

Hillel House

Attention, Jewish students and friends! Discussions on Jewish topics, Jewish feminist movement, social events, "ask a rabbi," "Ghetto Shul," Torah study, dating services, message boards, and much more!!!

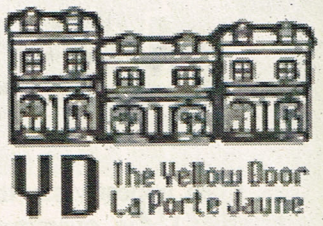
Ask for rabbi Dov Whitman.
3460 Stanley Street
(Hillel library)
845-9171
rabbi@hillel.ca

International Students!

Are you freezing?

Lightly used coats, clothing, shoes, and boots are available free of charge to International Students. Stop by Chaplaincy Services.

3600 McTavish St., Suite 4400
Monday-Friday, 9:30-4:30
398-4104



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 398-6243 or email: elderlyproject@hotmail.com

Montreal Diocesan Theological College

3473 University Ave.
Daily Christian worship—all are welcome!
Morning Prayer, Mon.-Thurs.: 8:00 am
Evening Prayer, Mon.-Thurs.: 4:30 pm
Eucharist Wed. 11.30 am (followed by lunch),
Fri. 7.30 am
All are welcome!

Free Zen Meditation

McGill Chaplaincy
3600 McTavish, #4400
Thursdays 3-4 pm
(Discussion, Instruction, and Q&A at 2:45)

Radix publishes ads for groups and events with a spiritual or social-justice theme–for FREE! Email radix@mail.mcgill.ca