



Fresh Rain

A Quarterly e-Journal of the Open Path / Sufi Way

FALL 2023

IN THIS ISSUE: Prose by Sabah Raphael Reed, Pir Elias Amidon, Carol Blackwood, Andy Bayliss, and Binah Taylor. Poetry by Carol Blackwood, Jeanne Rana, Klaus-Peter Esser, and Amrita Skye Blaine.



Dear Friends,

Fall's theme is **Harvesting**. Our tomatoes are almost done. Delicata squash have been harvested.

The lantana is still in full bloom, but for how long? There's a autumnal chill in the air some mornings. And when I awaken at 5 a.m., it's dark now. I live in California, so the seasonal markers may be different for you. But I find I'm anticipating the dark time.

Our theme for Winter will be **Darkness**, or **In the Dark**. What brews there? How do we take our rest? Do we make time for introspection? How is winter different for you? It's time for a new influx of themes. Please send me ideas of what you find enticing.

Thanks to all who offer their hearts through words in *Fresh Rain*. Consider writing for future issues, sharing yourself with our larger community. This is one of the ways that we get to know each other, this worldwide community of awakening souls.

With love for each one of you,
Amrita
editor, *Fresh Rain*: freshrain@sufiway.org



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Harvesting Dark Wisdom

by Sabah Raphael Reed

Our communal focus on *Life Matters* over the past year has had a steadying effect on me. From a place of overwhelm last Winter, I now experience a new sense of re-sourcing connected to harvesting in a deeper way the gifts of dark wisdom.

What is this thing we call “Life”?

Sometimes, if touched by grace, Life feels like a great song—the unstoppable and mysterious flow and resonance of This/Tao/Divine/Beloved constantly calling us into being. Rilke expresses this beautifully:

I circle around God, around the primordial tower.
I've been circling for thousands of years
and I still don't know: am I a falcon
a storm, or a great song?

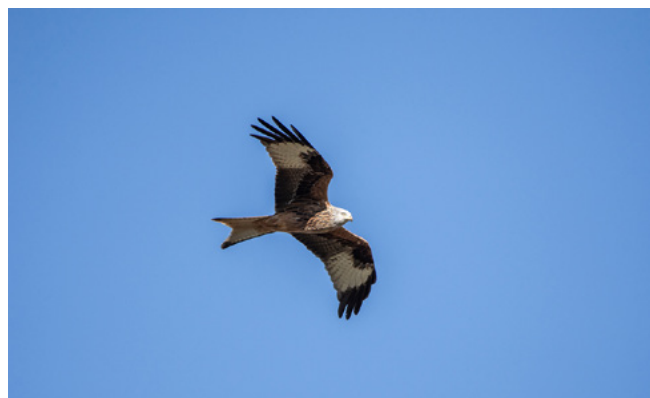
Or another powerful image is that of Grandmother Spider endlessly weaving the tapestry of creation, with us as the rabid dog who gets hold of a thread and pulls and pulls in a great unraveling. But she isn't fazed. The dog and the thread are all one. She simply returns again and again to weaving the fabric of the world.

In responding to the existential challenges of our time, it feels essential that we understand life and death, light and dark, joy and sorrow as indivisible. They are the same thing manifesting differently, simultaneously arising and mutually co-existing. But our ambivalence about the dark makes it difficult to stay present to the dark essences. Indeed, how we relate to the dark affects our ability to stay present and awake in this period of dark descent or to embrace this as an initiatory moment. Inspired by Deborah Eden Tull and her wonderful book *Luminous Darkness*, I've come to understand that endarkenment is as essential as enlightenment.

Increasingly I see awakening to these truths and nurturing such awakening in others as the most important thing we can do in service to our world. A profound invitation is always present, i.e. to live life as one continuous zikr—constantly committing to awakening, remembering our true nature and embodying Presence.

For the inverse of this is also apparent. Severance from these truths is the greatest wound in the world. Desperation, distress, despair, violence, hatred, anger and destruction all follow from falling asleep to our true nature.

Again, to quote Wendell Berry, there are no unsacred places (or moments). There are just sacred and desecrated places. Our task is to be part of re-sacralizing the world—to honor the sacred but equally to turn toward the desecrated and hold it tenderly, reminding it of its essence, its primordial wholeness. We need in a sense to be soul-workers



committed to restoring wholeness in whatever ways we can and thereby contributing toward a necessary healing.

For this we need to be incredibly humble. We need to listen to deeper wisdoms. We need to let go of ego and our sense of self-importance including the sense that we are able to solve the complex issues of the world or address them only through rational plans and programmatic action. We need to dissolve the separation between spiritual awakening and social action. The more awake we can be and the more we can live from an undefended heart, the more we are able to discover what matters in any moment and respond appropriately to what is present right now. And in all of this, let us remember we are resourced by something greater than our individual small selves; we are all held in the arms of the Beloved.

Finally, there is something here about attuning to our gifts. By virtue of being alive, we are the Gift. We each hold tremendous gifts to be offered into the world. Some manifest as small and humble acts of gentle kindness; some are more fierce and warrior-like offerings. All of them have a place in the tapestry of things. But for a gift to be animated, it must be given.

As Marge Piercy writes in her poem “If they Come in the Night”:

... let me not feel ... that I forgot
to give what I held in my hands,
that I forgot to do some little
piece of the work that wanted
to come through.

So, what is your gift?

In all that is happening in the world right now, there is a great medicine—a tincture. It may at times feel bitter and harsh. We may not survive the treatment. We may in fact find ourselves serving as hospice workers to a dying world. But seeing *everything* as a medicine, or as a stern teacher, is an essential part of being transformed by the dark journey ahead.

Harvesting the Gifts of the Ancestors

by Pir Elias Amidon

Some thirty years ago my wife Rabia and I were working closely with Joanna Macy in the creation of our *Institute for Deep Ecology*. During that time, I learned from Joanna her guided meditation “Harvesting the Gifts of the Ancestors,” which was often enacted by physically walking backwards, as if through time, to the period when our human ancestors first emerged from the trees in the African savannah, and then walking forward again through time to the present, gathering the gifts that our ancestors have bestowed on us. A few of you may remember that I once led this meditation during a Sufi gathering at the Universel.

The following text is my version of the meditation, inspired by Joanna. I’ve shortened it here to just include the second half of the meditation, when we stop going back through time and begin the journey back to now, harvesting the ancestors’ gifts as we go.

And now you stop. Now with the very first ones, you stand at the edge of the forest.

Pause now, looking out over the savannah. Witness this place. The journey of your people lies ahead.

And now, slowly, begin to walk forward on that same journey now. Slowly retrace your steps, returning through time.

Understand that each ancestor of yours has a gift to bestow — open your arms and hands to receive these gifts, let them in.

These people are giving to you the texture of your skin, the shape of your back, the marrow in your bones. They give to you courage and strength and perseverance as they travel the land: hunting, playing, making babies, dying.

Take these gifts. The storytellers and the healers give you their wisdom. The hunters give you their alertness. The root gatherers give you their patience.

Take these gifts. Take the laughter that they give you. Witness a moment 30,000 years ago, the laughter of two young girls splashing in a stream.

Come forward through the years now, harvesting the gifts of your ancestors. Receive what they offer — receive all that you need.

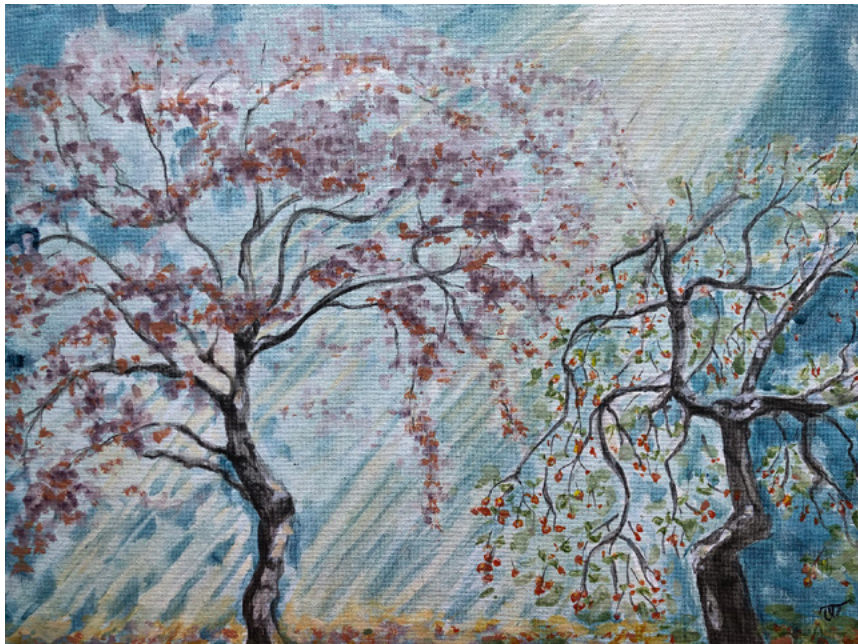
Walk up through the centuries. See the trust in the eyes of the children. See the passion in the eyes of the young. See the wisdom in the eyes of the aged. Receive these as gifts.

Witness the creativity of your ancestors, making tools, weaving cloth, building homes. Receive that creativity as their gift to you.

Witness the compassion of your ancestors, caring for an injured child or praying with the dying. Receive that compassion as their gift to you.

Witness the love of beauty they delighted in, the music of a flute coming from the hills, the hands carving jewelry, feet dancing to the rhythm of drums. Receive that love of beauty as their gift to you.

Witness the intelligence of your ancestors, tracking the movements of stars, learning the ways of the plants and animals, holding councils with the tribe to determine the wisest action. Receive that intelligence as their gift to you.



Umtul Valeton-Kiekens

Witness the love your ancestors experienced, for their families and their communities and their land and their God. Receive that love as their gift to you.

Witness the humor your ancestors shared, smiles and jokes while they worked together, the laughter of young couples walking in the forest, the smiles of the grandmother as she listens to the child. Receive this humor, the humor of your ancestors, as their gift to you.

Witness the suffering your ancestors endured, through times of religious and ethnic persecution, through wars and revolutions. Witness a moment of it, and your ancestors' courage in the face of suffering. Receive that gift of courage.

Witness the innumerable acts of kindness that occurred during those hard times, during the plagues and wars and forced marches. Receive those gifts of kindness to you and your lineage.

Go on now, move through the centuries, move into the industrial age, the world changed by machines — witness and receive the resilience and dreams your ancestors offer you through those times.

And now you come closer to this century, through the lives of your grandparents, and your parents. Receive the

gifts they offer you: your face, the stories you share, the guidance.

Now enter the time of your life. You are born here again, into these times. See how over the course of your life to this moment you have received gifts from all those who have been close to you. Accept them, let them in.

And now come to this present moment and stop.

You are here again, on this brink of time. It is now, and you are here, alive, breathing.

Your ancestors who have gone before you, who have loved and tended this Earth and given strength to each other, offer you the strength and love you need now, to do what needs to be done — so that their journey and yours may continue.

The reformer comes to plow the ground;
the prophet comes to sow the seed;
and the priest comes to reap the harvest.

from the *Bowl of Saki* by Sufi Inayat Khan

A Juicy Ripening

by Carol Blackwood

There is something I want. I will not be so vulnerable as to tell you what that is. At least not today. But imagine something that your heart has yearned for. If you can do that, you will know the feeling.

I thought that because I wanted it, I was ready to have it. Today, while listening to a podcast, I came to the realization that wanting this unnamed event/experience doesn't mean that it is time for it. We don't want to harvest until the crop has ripened. And, in this area, I'm not yet ripe.

How do we know how long it takes to ripen? Over the years, a peach farmer will learn the feel, scent, and appearance of the perfectly ripened peach. But before that, she will probably pick some peaches too soon or too late. She will make mistakes. That is how she eventually learns to recognize the "just rightness" of perfect timing, of the perfect, drool-inspiring peach. Of course, she will also need to learn about the appropriate soil, temperature, and moisture conditions. But tasting her many mistakes along the way is the most fruitful way to arrive at knowing the best time to harvest.



When I started writing this, I thought that not feeling ripe enough was a good excuse to avoid opening to the thing I want. But thinking about peaches, besides exciting my salivary glands, has reminded me of the beauty of making however many mistakes are necessary in order to learn to harvest something juicy and sweet.

Mary Lou

by Andy Bayliss

I come through the sliding glass door tonight into Mom's living room. I see her small form on the flowered sofa, in her bathrobe. I see her eyes and hear her voice. Her voice is older than it used to be, and softer too, like her fine white hair. She seems to be shrinking into her bright old robe, nestling right into her end of life. The robe was her mother's, a gift from her father, probably from the 1960's: pink and quilted, with a fine-laced collar. Her ninety-three-year-old softness, inside a pink-fabric softness wrapped in an echo of her parents' softness.

I feel familiar and she feels familiar. I wonder for a moment what is this familiar feeling? Is it me? Is it her? Is this familiar feeling somehow made out of both of us?

I notice the walker by the sofa and the glimmer of TV light against her water glass, and I feel the polished oak floor under my feet. Very familiar. Dad bought this house in '79. Then we all moved to a house "near the college for the boys," and Mom managed this little ranch house as a rental. I remodeled it in '01. Mom moved in, alone in 2011.

I live out in the side yard now, kind of keeping watch. I arrange the appointments, pay the bills, drive Mom to the store, open her jars, interpret her phone's scratchy voice mails.

I ease in and sit next to Mom on the sofa. There's plenty of room on the big old cushions, but I know she wants me closer, even if she doesn't usually ask. Lately she sometimes takes my hand, or I take hers. Or if she's feeling tired she leans against my shoulder. She's taken sometimes to look me in the eye and say "I want to look at you; I want to see you while I can." Sometimes she leans against my shoulder and takes my arm and says "Here you are, my big strong son. How lucky I am!" I like sitting right next to Mom. Mom and I on the sofa. Everyone else gone now. A familiar feeling. Her hand in mine. Not much to be done about all this.

Old photos all around, since she's been sorting and throwing them out. My great grandfather with his chauffeur in Chicago; her playing with a leather ball on the dunes at age two; my brothers and me in Indiana in pajamas on the limestone hearth, fire blazing behind us at Christmas time.

Now it's just Mom and me, hand in hand. There's wood in the shed, plenty. There's some money in the bank. I can put a screw into something if it needs fixing. I feel her hand cool, and she feels mine warm.

Familiar and so wildly precious. Perhaps this preciousness is so important it doesn't quite show itself. But it gives us hints.

My hand in hers.



Harvesting the Stones

by Binah Taylor

Reap time.

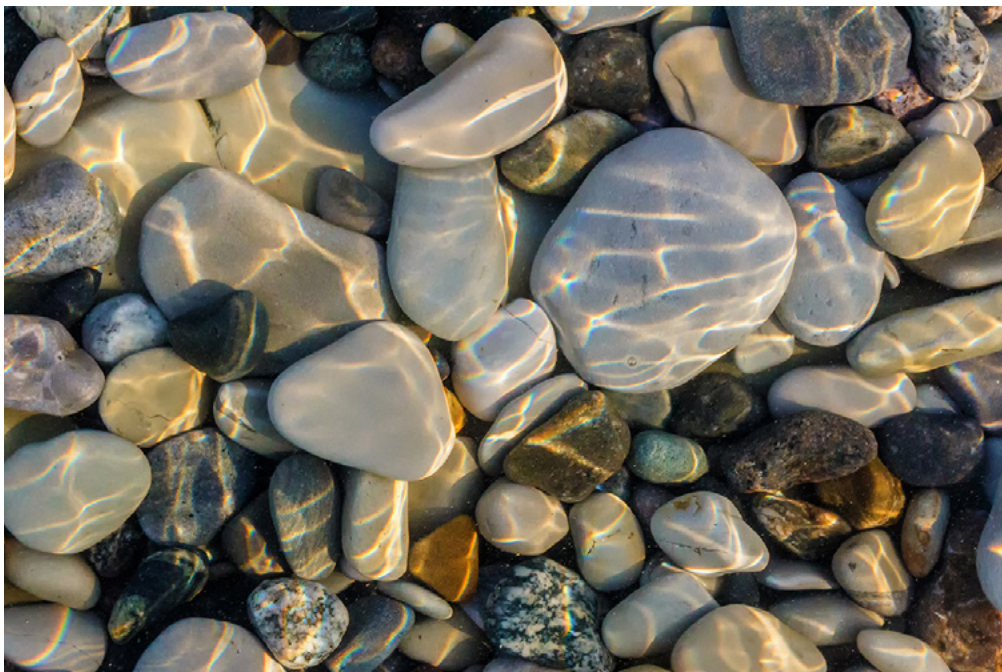
Almonds are ready, olives in waiting, figs all but gone. Lean pickings from lack of rain and months of scorch. The mood is somber. Harvest time is also an opportunity to calibrate future expectations, and an unexpected late summer rain brings hope for next year. The mood lightens with the pendulum swing.

Turning inward, I contemplate my harvesting in the late autumn of my life. What yields are in my basket? I see rich offerings, far outweighing the empty pots of missed opportunities and painful losses. In my gratitude I feel sure much of this is due to the energetic transmission from my ancestors — and I include the potent seed that regenerates and pulses through the *sil sileh* of the Sufi Way.

Many years ago, I watched an interview with the late architect I.M. Pei, whose work I very much admire. I.M. Pei spoke of the influences that shaped his vision as an architect. An important one, he said, was the tradition in his village in China of placing stones in the river to be shaped by moving water. Over time the stones would acquire a suitable form to be used in contemplative gardens. These stones would only be harvested by future generations, so those who placed them may never live to see them plucked out of the river. Similarly, stones would be harvested

that had been placed decades before by those who had since departed. I was inspired by this story: giving to future generations with no immediate reward, as well as being the recipient of what had been initiated in another time.

Reflecting on what seeds may have been sown by my ancestors, certain patterns emerge that make sense to my life, as if I have been shaped like the stones in the river. What first comes to mind is the gift of curiosity with courage to venture into the unknown. I recognize too the value placed on creativity both as playfulness and a way of seeing with fresh eyes. Then there is the deep appreciation of the natural world, which my grandfather etched and painted as an act of devotion. It was said of him that he painted with the eyes of a poet and the skill of a craftsman. These are just a few of the gifts I have been given by those who came before whom I never met in person. It is up to me to honor them as well as the Sufi Way whose spirit of guidance has been pivotal to my journeying. Now I must provide gifts for those who will come after me: in my dreaming I am planting seeds to value and embrace difference, to respect the earth and sea and all creatures, to have an open heart guided by empathy and understanding. Dear reader, what seeds are you planting for future harvesting?



This is the harvest
Each moment is the fruit of all pasts
How sweet the flavors!

—Carol Blackwood



You Were In My Dream Again

I dreamed we were new,
your hair black, mine brown.
We were learning to touch each other,
our fire wild and dangerous.

Now we are old friends
singing, walking slow.
We are old lovers,
our fire warms, not burns.

We have had adventures
ecstasies, catastrophes.
I have loved you desperately.
Now I love you gratefully.

—Jeanne Rana

The Orchard

I walk through my orchard.
It is autumn – the sun still shines mildly
the grass is still green,
sprinkled with some beautiful red apples
which have fallen on the earth overnight.

I stop and pick them up – all!

The tree – that is me
The apples – fruits, that have grown over
springtime and summer
The apples – they are my gifts
Autumn – that is the time for harvesting
The harvest – that is collecting the apples
and give them away in deep gratitude
Not wasting any of these apples.

Why else am I here?

—Klaus-Peter Esser



One Day You Realize

One day you realize
your life has changed,
a subtle shift in the air,
a moment of light shimmering on water.

The Beloved is flirting with you,
waiting for you to notice.
Beauty hides and seeks you.
Heaven (and hell) are here, right now.

As Rumi says, don't go back to sleep.
You have been invited to dance.
Quit worrying about what to wear.
The music has started.

—Jeanne Rana

And This



harvest

it's time to reap
 this life's encounter
 assessing
 what went well
 what went wrong
 scores of missteps
 troubled liaisons

etched on my chest
 when I landed on earth
teach me
 and so life did
 substantial lessons
 surprise quizzes
 watch what you ask for

and say yes—
 I'm suggesting
 it's worth it
 it prodded me here
 to this unexpected
 improbable
 realm of love

—Amrita Skye Blaine

paring down

old age
 called it in
 I didn't choose
 this stage
 of paring down
 like or not,
 outgrown roles
 are slipping off
 like oiled coats
 shed rain

it feels respectful
 to let go, rehearsal
 for what's coming
 when every earthly
 trait is freed—
 it's with regret
 I let posts go
 and watch them
 fall
 to someone new

clearing a place
 for what remains,
 the work of now
 that's prodding me—
 this work
 in order to unfold
 wants space,
 breadth and depth
 to dive

I must comply

—Amrita Skye Blaine

Upcoming Online Programs



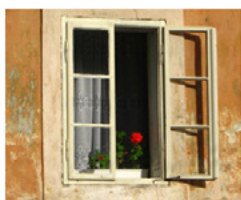
Staying Steady
An Online Retreat
with Pir Elias Amidon
October 1 – December 19, 2023

This retreat is about staying steady through the great and small challenges of our lives.

Click [here](#) for more information.



Living Sufism
 This year's theme is *Love's Drum — the Resilience of the Human Spirit*.
 Open to all. To register, click [here](#).



Openings
 Esoteric Study Class open to Sufi Way initiates and Open Path graduates. Click [here](#) for more information

Every Thursday



First Thursday:
ALANKARA
 A classic style of Sufi communal contemplation.
 Click [here](#) for more information



Second Thursday:
SAMA
 Musical meditations (zikr) with Murshida Suzanne Inayat-Khan and Omar Inayat-Khan
 Click [here](#) for more information



Third Thursday:
SHARING SILENCE
 with Pir Elias.
 Click [here](#) for more information



Fourth Thursday:
A TIME FOR QUESTIONS
 This is a time for asking Pir Elias any questions you might have.
 Click [here](#) for more information



Fifth Thursday:
ATTUNEMENTS
 Community offerings of meditations and practices.
 Click [here](#) for more information

