



Fresh Rain

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

SPRING 2015

IN THIS ISSUE: Sufi Inayat Khan on "Other," reflections and poems by Pir Elias, Kunderke Noverraz, Yona Chavanne, Amrita Skye Blaine, Dahan Bakker, Carol Barrow, and more...



Dear Friends,

Every day, we greet the "apparent other." How do we respond when we are confronted with people or events either out of, or in rhythm with our own experience of life? In both of these situations, can we rest as the awareness we are — prior to our layering of story and feeling — and see the other as an expression of the very same presence of awareness?

Each of us may undergo a wide range of internal responses when meeting apparent others. This is a moment to release judgment, and instead, invite awe and curiosity at our own resistance or openness — a willingness to look, take a breath, and look afresh.

In the Summer issue of *Fresh Rain*, let's explore the theme "Being Alone." In the Fall issue, the theme will be "The Music of Life."

Please send prose, poems, or theme suggestions to: freshrain@sufiway.org

With love, and deep gratitude for those who offer themselves in the form of writing for *Fresh Rain*.

Amrita



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I Call Thee Me

– SUFI INAYAT KHAN

I call thee my king when I am conscious
of my bubble-like self.
But when I am conscious of thee, my beloved,
I call thee me.

The Monk's Quest

– PIR ELIAS AMIDON

A few years ago in Thailand I was teaching deep ecology to a group of twenty Theravada Buddhist monks and one Buddhist nun. One day we went on a “contemplative walk” into the Thai jungle, experiencing the interdependent nature of the living world.

On the next day, we embarked on a riskier excursion into an opposite realm. We repeated the contemplative walk, but this time in Bangkok’s largest shopping mall, with all the tokens of modernity as their “dharma teacher.”

Monks are not expected to enter shopping malls, and few ever do. Since they have renounced possessions, sex, music, money, and most other stimulations, there isn’t much point for them to go there. Many of the monks expressed some fear about the trip and its potential for embarrassment, though they knew that no one was required to go. I suggested they experience this “mall quest” as a meditation, and seek to be mindful about everything that arose in their hearts: judgment, anger, embarrassment, desire, or curiosity.

When our big bus pulled into the mall parking lot, I asked for silence, and then invited the monks to chant the same chant for protection and blessing they had chanted the previous day in the jungle. When the chant was finished I rang a little bell, which meant our two hours of silent mindfulness was beginning. We sat together in the metal cocoon of the bus for a few moments until the atmosphere was steady — though we were all filled with expectancy. Then one by one we left the bus and headed toward the immense mall buildings. The little procession of orange-robed figures disappeared through the entrance doors beneath the confident sign: “FUTURE PARK.”

I felt myself drawn in behind the monks and the one white-robed Cambodian nun, and soon, like them, I was walking slowly, mindfully, breathing, breathing, through the



gauntlet of blaring pop-rock tunes, KFCs and McDonalds, and the millions of items of the plundered world.

Each of us wandered on our own. Soon we lost sight of each other — although over the next two hours I occasionally saw an orange-robed figure hesitating in front of an Estelle Lauder perfume counter, wondering where to put his eyes, or one gliding up an escalator like a lost angel in the vast central atrium.

Two hours later we gathered again in the bus and drove back in silence to the ashram where we were staying. I had suggested earlier that we might wish to maintain our silence, but there was no need for the suggestion. The atmosphere on the bus was sad, thoughtful, and awed.

Later on, telling their stories, it became clear just how difficult this had been for them. “I thought it would be easy,” one monk said, “but when I stood at the entrance my knees shook!”

I had asked them to write notes at intervals during their experience — it would help to keep them centered. Now back at the ashram the monks turned to their notebooks and smiled at themselves.

“I had never seen the moving stairs (escalator),” said one. “I stood and watched how people did it, then I put my

foot on it and the machine took my foot up by itself — I had to jump!”

Another: “I was embarrassed to be there as a monk. So I took off my shoes to make it even harder for myself. Then I saw the mall was like the world the Buddha’s father had tried to display to young Siddhartha — a world of only happiness and pleasure: no suffering, old age, or death. In the forest the trees show all sides of life — their leaves fall and decay right beneath their flower blossoms. In the mall they tried to create a heaven with no suffering. But to learn to be free from suffering you need to be with suffering. And when I walked out, I saw mall laborers trying to find rest in the heat, and I realized how the unseen people who are needed to run that mall had to suffer to keep it going.”

Another: “I saw we were like a line of brave soldiers silently entering the mall. I was proud of us. I felt my brother monks were holy ones going to offer merit to the suffering ones in that hell realm.”

Another: “I felt uncomfortable at first, and confused. It was very loud. I was unsure how to hold a mindfulness practice in such a place. Usually we practice mindfulness in a quiet temple or in the forest. Then I imagined that the noises were crickets and loud birds. Later two children stopped and bowed to me. Their kindness made me feel elated.”

Another: “I saw the mall was like a big robot. The food court was the stomach. The stores for clothes were the body. And on the top floor, the video machines were the head.”

Another: “I saw the unlimited desire of the world.”

War and Peace

– KUNDERKE NOVERRAZ

I was nineteen years old when the violence of the world smashed into my heart and set off a contraction from which it took many years to recover. My family had been living for some years in Eastern Nigeria, the oil-rich region which in that year declared its independence as a new state with the name of Biafra. The Biafran war that followed was prolonged and gruesome and ended in a crushing defeat for the Biafrans.

I myself did not witness the worst violence of this war since my family had long been evacuated by then, but the preliminaries were bad enough. Horrific massacres in the Northern Province of Nigeria led to a massive exodus of one million refugees streaming back home to Eastern Nigeria and a frenzy of revenge killings of any Northerner that could be found there. Horror stories were told everywhere: bodies in the roads, people killed as they tried to seek sanctuary and so on.

I was deeply shaken and transfixed by this experience; it was hard to think of anything else. My mind, struggling to deal with the enormity of such slaughter, could not cope. I felt profoundly anxious and concluded that the world was cruel, violent and unjust. Suddenly it seemed that all the concerns of the people I knew were superficial and avoidant of this harsh truth about life. T.S. Eliot’s words “Humankind cannot bear much reality” kept on reverberating in my mind and I was both angry and perplexed as to how to find meaning in such a world. How could I strive for a participating role in this great cruel and blinkered human drama? I became cynical and depressed.

It was not that I did not recognise another possibility. I did! Living in Africa I was particularly touched by the pure beauty of the wilderness and the vast clear starlit skies, and there was always also the beauty of music. I could declare “I am not religious but when I listen to this music I feel religious.” But the transcendent beauty of those moments was separate, very separate from what I was perceiving as the reality of the human world. A big schism between heaven and earth established itself in my mind. Whereas the heavens were full of transcendent beauty and peace, the earth seemed to me like a crawling mass of murderous vermin.

It was very painful to live with such an inner schism. I felt alienated, out of connection with myself and others, and found it hard to find direction, hard to trust and hard to love. In short it was hard to live. Yet I was gripped by an intense longing for something other than this, and to find relief from the pain. This started my search and ultimately I came to Sufism.

Many, many years later I am in a concert hall in Konya during the annual mystic music festival. The singers are a group of Sufi women from Chechnya. No longer young and pretty, their faces lined,



their bodies stout, their voices rise raw and powerful as the earth itself. Their singing is a lament — a lament for their children who have died in the war, for their land which has been ravaged. Their song pierces my heart and I cry. Looking next to me I see my husband Karim with tears streaming down his cheeks, and looking further I see people dabbing at their eyes with tissues. We are all weeping with these women, our hearts acknowledging their pain. Then through all the sorrow comes their zikr 'la illaha, il'Allah — there is no God but God. All is One, they sing, there is no separation. Even this senseless pain is but a human distortion and should not be an obstacle to the awareness that all is One, and all is well that ends well. Surrender to God, they sing, surrender to the Unity and Peace which underlie all the crazy tragedies we humans can summon up.

La illaha, il'Allah. In traditional Sufi practices mureeds or dervishes were asked to repeat this phrase daily for thousands of times so that ultimately their individual consciousness became completely filled with it. So that every action was done to the inner beat of "la illaha, il'Allah," every thought, every emotion rested on the sea of "la illaha,il'Allah."

Today in the Sufi Way we likewise aim at resting in Pure Awareness. To live our life feeling our human feelings, doing our human doings, but at the same time humming with the joy of the Presence which reveals itself in each and every moment. Living with a joy, for even as we cry, the realisation that life itself is beautiful remains.

As I look at our garden I see peace and verdant beauty. Yet battles are being fought everywhere. Insects, worms, spiders, birds, even snakes and scorpions and various mammals seek to survive and in this struggle can destroy each other. The garden, however, remains pure. Peace is here — la illaha, il'Allah.

And what if this garden itself were to be destroyed through human action or inaction. Would I still be able to see the Peace and the Beauty? Could I still trust that this garden is only one small manifestation of the much larger garden of life itself, and that like all manifestations it can come and can go? Would I trust in the gardens of Life even as this one is being destroyed? I cannot know this now but I hope I can. I hope that that is the lesson I have learned over all the years of living since I was that young nineteen year old. I pray that peace will remain in my heart even as I cry my human tears.



Pearl

– SUFI INAYAT KHAN

I searched
but I could not find thee.
I called thee aloud
standing on the minaret.

I rang the temple bell
with the rising and setting of the sun
I bathed in the Ganges in vain.
I came back from Kaaba disappointed.

I looked for thee on the earth.
I searched for thee in the heaven, my beloved.
And at last I have found thee,
hidden as a pearl in the shell of my heart.

Encountering the Other

– YONA CHAVANNE

"The creative is the place where no one else has ever been. You have to leave the city of your comfort and go into the wilderness of your intuition. What you'll discover will be wonderful. What you'll discover is yourself."

— Alan Alda

I don't know if I shall discover myself, I don't even know if "myself" can be discovered. But it's truly a great experience to "go into the wilderness of one's intuition," meeting intuition. How could it be wild? It may seem wild since there is displacement from our usual, conditioned self into something utterly unknown, beyond rational or emotional grasp.

The experience of encountering is subtle and happens on many levels — perception, senses, nervous system, the complexity of our human condition made whole in an instant.

"Encountering the other" manifests in many ways and is portrayed in countless fashions. The experience happens out of the blue, unexpectedly, no effort involved. A small story:

I am driving to nearby France, towards an industrial zone. Recovering from flu, still slightly shaky, I feel worried not to find the place I am heading for — where I have never been before.

I realize I have taken a "wrong" turn at the crossroads, and attempt to get back to the "right" itinerary. So I am now driving on a road new to me.

After a steep hill, a tremendous landscape of mountains suddenly unfolds. It is late morning, the sky is grey yet luminous; the highest summits show white; the nearest, some twenty to fifty kilometers away, are darker and in many shades.

I am shaken. The mountains penetrate me, I am within them, I am them. They utter no sound and yet in their silence they speak, and disclose their existence in a far deeper way than I normally experience them.

Although I'm deeply moved, their amazing touch doesn't prevent me from driving, and finally reaching my destination.



Copyright: <http://www.ivydra.com/blog/tag/snow/>

This range of mountains, close to Geneva, is a familiar view. Each time one looks at it, it is there, like on a postcard, stolid, as if forever.

Such a fabulous moment transforms the relation we have with "the other" — here, encountering mountain. My conditioned perception was scattered. I experienced at-oneness, completeness, intense beauty. In the moment described above, the mountains' being was not anymore simply "familiar." It was alive. "I" was porous, vulnerable. The mountains spoke in their mountain tongue, and their music resonated through me.

"Which ever way you turn, there is its, her, his presence."

Encountering the Apparent Other

– AMRITA SKYE BLAINE

On Sunday, we drove to Drakes Beach in Point Reyes, California. The day dawned clear and rose to sweater weather in the afternoon. Part of the beach was cordoned off to protect unexpected visitors, elephant seals. A female and three young males lounged, occasionally flipping sand on their backs to keep cool. One male rushed the female, practicing his humping technique. She seemed bored and put upon by his youthful antics.

About forty people milled. I listened carefully, and heard comments like “ungainly” and “ugly.” A few people laughed, and made crude jokes while they pointed. That’s what the unexamined human mind does. Discernment, a necessary and useful tool, bleeds into less useful judgment at another’s expense.

This beautiful male — about seven years old, I learned from the naturalist — weighs 2000-3000 pounds. He’s a teenager, who will almost double in weight in the next few years. He is perfectly designed for his ocean habitat, hunting squid ten months of the year in the frigid depths. On the sand, he can move so fast that a human needs to run to get out of his way. He is curious, but not judging

the restless humans crowding and pushing to get near. The three naturalists have to be very attentive to keep this crowd, and the elephant seal, safe.

I had a precious minute with him eye-to-eye. Benign awareness radiated — the same awareness I find within myself. There was no other here. Our forms are different, yes. Our ways and habits of being in this world vary. But as we gazed at each other, I noticed that he too, is abiding, at rest in himself.



<http://www.free-picture.net/animals/seals/elephant-seal-desktop.jpg.html>

The Other

– CAROL BARROW

During the build-up to the Iraq War, and throughout the most intense years of the war, activism was a huge part of my life. I marched in Denver and Washington, D.C., I blogged, attended rallies, and wrote many letters. Twice, I did the thirteen hour drive to Crawford, Texas so that I could join hundreds of others in standing with Cindy Sheehan, a mom who wanted to meet with George W. Bush in order to ask him for what noble cause her son had died. Between 2001 and 2006, I experienced George W. Bush as “other.” Bush and his administration put our country at war with Afghanistan and Iraq, and I put myself at war with Bush, Cheney, and Rumsfeld.

In 2007, I took my first Open Path Training, and the idea of a “me” against George Bush or anyone else started to crumble — not completely then, or even now, but the

inflated ego balloon began to deflate, and I lost interest in divisive thinking and action.

Over the years, I have come to appreciate the fact that G.W. Bush was instrumental in changing my life — in different ways, but just as much, as other teachers who have opened me up. I am grateful that George Bush and his administration helped me to become more socially aware, and the friendships I made while protesting put me on the road to finding Pir Elias. And I am thankful that Pir Elias and the Open Path trainings offer the recognition that all is Awareness showing up as Bush, Carol, the other. That doesn’t mean that I now support wars or that I don’t have sadness at the loss of lives and environment, but now the war can stop here.

All names and forms are the garbs and covers under which the one life is hidden.

— Sufi Inayat Khan



Show Me the Way

Show me the way
In the ocean of filled emptiness
In the sea of unused fractals
In the ever-expanding consciousness of
My non-importance
Show me the way

Show me the way
To the heart of things
To the source of the source
To the acceptance of Your way

Show me the way

– db 2003



Do you hear her, calling?



Do you hear her, calling?

In the low rush of blood
pulsating on the drum.

In the darkening sod,
thick on blade and rim.

In the murmuration of birds
and the slow creep of worms.

But there is no listening for her.
She is already and always here —

inside the ear,
inside the breath,

inside the questioning
and
disappearing
word.

– LYNN RAPHAEL REED



Love Has No Opposite

You are teaching me
Not to fight
Not to set up in opposition
Teaching me that faith
Is about
Trusting more and more
Deeply
The absolute truth
That Love has no opposite
Not as abstraction
But as melting moment
A trickle
A puddle a flow
Where once there was
But ice

– ANGUS LANDMAN

Meeting Each Other

With each issue of Fresh Rain we will include a few short biographical sketches and photos of Sufi Way initiates. Since many of us are scattered in different places on the globe, this is one way we can introduce ourselves to each other — along with speaking

together on teleconferences or, if we're lucky, meeting each other at a program or retreat. If you would like to introduce yourself like this, send a photo and a 200-word (or less) bio written in the first person to: freshrain@sufiway.org



Ali MacArthur

For most of my life I have been a “spiritual seeker,” living in spiritual communities for fifteen years in the 80s, 90s and up to the end of 2001; firstly in a Gurdjieff/Ouspensky community and then as a student of an

American “guru” figure.

In 2005 I spent some months being with my mother as she was dying, which was an amazing experience and led me later to do volunteer work in a London hospice. In 2008 my partner and I went to live in the Apennine mountains in Italy, where we spent a few valuable years offering our home to visitors who felt drawn to join us in our beautiful old stone house and relax, walk in the mountains, meditate and do yoga with us.

I now live in Bristol where I am a part of a lovely group of “Open Pathers” and I am recommencing my work supporting people who are terminally ill. My partner, in the meantime, is currently fulfilling his lifelong wish to ride around Africa on a bicycle and is following his path. We are both grateful for the modern technology that allows us to see each other on Skype every now and again!



Omar Inayat-Khan

Blessed by having been born into the Inayat-Khan family, I spent my early years exposed to the many colors and shades of the Inayati spiritual traditions and paths.

In the early 1970s, my father insisted that I learn how to play the Harmonium and other Indian musical instruments to a professional level and give concerts in both India and Europe. I completed this cycle of my young life and then dropped it all and disappeared off the radar leaving this gift hidden — perhaps lost forever? After twenty years, I returned to the Sufi Way to be welcomed by friends, family, seekers and musicians, all beautifully mixed into a single whole of Joy and Peace.

In 2004, I was encouraged to re-open my long lost training in Harmonium and with the patient and consistent guidance of Murshida Mehera and Murshid Dahan; this reawakened gift has blossomed into co-leading the London Sufi Way Centre.

The Open Path has been a softening, healing and unlearning journey that continues today, teaching me to see beyond that which limits my vision.

Upcoming Programs 2015



Mysticism and Music

A Weekend Retreat in Amsterdam
Kunderke and Karim Noverraz

March 28 – March 29, 2015



Wilderness Quest

A nine-day rite-of-passage in the
Canyonlands of Utah

Elias Amidon and Rabia Elizabeth Roberts
September 25 – October 4, 2015



Clear Light and the Beauty of the World

An Open Path Retreat
Nada Hermitage, Crestone, Colorado
Pir Elias Amidon

April 9 – 16, 2015



Coming of Age

A retreat on embracing our aging and mortality
Nada Hermitage, Crestone, Colorado

Elias Amidon and Rabia Elizabeth Roberts
November 12 – 19, 2015



Heart and Wings

A Summer Experience of Qawwali, Poetry, & Zikr
Den Oever, The Netherlands

Kiran and Jeanne Rana

June 12 – 14, 2015



The Way of the Message

A Summer Gathering of the
Sufi Way/Open Path at the
Universel Sufi Temple, Holland

August 18 – 22, 2015



Celebrants Training

A training for Sufi Way initiates in creating and
facilitating rituals, worships, and celebrations
Universel Sufi Temple, Holland.

August 23 – 24, 2015

Ongoing Programs 2015



Living Sufism

Year-Long Teleconference
Eight Senior Teachers of the Sufi Way

Oct. 19 – June 21

Bimonthly talks



2015 9-Month Open Path Trainings

A nine-month training to introduce you to the
direct experience of pure awareness

England and Germany

Starting Feb. 2015