



Fresh Rain

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

SUMMER 2015

IN THIS ISSUE: Reflections on "Aloneness" by Ali MacArthur, Lynn Raphael Reed, Amrita Skye Blaine, Puran Perez, and Pir Elias; poems by Kalandar Warren and Lynn Raphael Reed



Dear Friends,

Does the idea of being alone frighten, excite, or delight you? In this issue, enjoy a variety of perspectives on aloneness: Ali MacArthur writes about being alone for the first time in many years; Lynn Raphael Reed writes about delving into the depths while questing with Elias and Rabia.

I recalled an experience forty-five years ago which opened a window—Elias provided the door for me thirty-eight years later in the Open Path training. Looking through the lens of music lyrics, Puran Perez points to there being no other, and Elias closes the prose section with aphorisms.

The theme of the Fall issue is "The Music of Life." I hope, with the strength of the musical path in the Sufi Way, for a rich offering of writing. Please send me pieces!

And in the Winter issue, let's explore death and dying—both metaphorical and actual.

with love to you all,

Amrita

editor, Fresh Rain



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Aloneness

— ALI MACARTHUR

Living on my own for the first time for many years, I'm experiencing anew the gift of silence and all that arises and falls within the Silence.

Without another person to distract myself with, I notice how the desire to chat about trivia, complain, judge, or otherwise create a diversion arises, and when it isn't gratified by being expressed, simply disappears, back into the Silence. That Silence all around it, within it, throughout it, never moves, never goes anywhere, never becomes disturbed; it simply IS—and in that "is-ness" the entity that I think of as "me" also dissolves, never moves, never goes anywhere, can never be disturbed.

"Saturate yourself in this," Elias said recently; and indeed, what else is there to do?

Everything arises in the Silence; there is nothing we can do or say that isn't of it. It allows everything, contains everything, expresses everything and denies nothing.

I found myself spontaneously writing the above paragraphs a few months ago, shortly after I had moved countries to a new home and alone in a city I had never lived in before. Six months on, I am continuing to experience aloneness, which has thrown me into many different states and offered me many valuable insights, in all its myriad forms.

When we use the words "aloneness" or "solitude," there are so many interpretations that spring to mind and many of them, to most people, are negative. To be alone is so often regarded as something unwanted, to be avoided, something that evokes fear—fear of what? Well, to name but a few sensations familiar to most of us:

the "lonely" sense of having no one to be with; feeling unloved; alienated from others; abandoned by others; being a victim; being bored; being sad; being uncomfortable; feeling depressed; believing that life is cruel; believing something is very wrong, either with life or with ourselves; and even despair, resulting from one or many of these ideas.

David Whyte, a wonderful writer and poet of our time, writes *"To find ourselves alone, or to be left alone, is an ever present, fearful and abiding human potentiality, of which we are often unconsciously and deeply afraid."* And of course, as human beings, when we are abiding in any one of those negative and identified states, we often tend to shut ourselves off even more than we already are and push people away, or even worse we bore everyone to tears with our neediness and complaining so that they don't want to be around us—and then we can justify feeling even more lonely and unloved!



However, solitude in fact is not loneliness, is not a feeling; it is the actual state of being alone. It is a state that people are sometimes forced into by life circumstances, or it can be an experience that someone chooses, generally for a fixed period of time, in order to give themselves a break from the so-called pressures of their every day life. Many writers over the centuries have described solitude as having a real potential for something new to emerge in our lives. David Whyte says that solitude, or *"being alone is a difficult discipline; a beautiful and difficult sense of being solitary is always the ground from which we step into a contemplative intimacy with the unknown."*

So what does this really mean in our lives? My experience over the past year is that being alone, be it willingly or unwillingly, has forced me to listen to my mind's incredibly repetitive, mechanical, never-endingly selfish desires and judgments until eventually the sheer boredom of those unending thoughts encourages me to simply leave them be; to stop trying to work them out, control them, or change them. And when I can do that, can simply have no interest in their content, then...

there is a S P A C E...

and when I can allow that silent space to fill me, can allow myself to sink into it without needing to fill it, I can *"stop telling the story altogether."* (David Whyte)

And when we stop telling our stories—WHAT THEN?

During my months of being alone I have discovered that when I truly get bored of the same old stories—as I cease to be interested in the repetitive burlings of my mind and simply allow those thoughts to enter my awareness, become noticed, and pass through and away, without trying to make them meaningful by interpreting, resisting

or trying to change any one of them, then a new kind of LISTENING emerges. It is as if a gateway appears, through which something else is discovered that is not already familiar, not already known. And accepting the invitation to pass through this gateway, which I discover is *always* open, exposes everything that exists, in its real and uncorrupted state—be it raw vulnerability, be it confusion or fear, be it the reliving of old, long forgotten or long suppressed trauma memories now uncovered because nothing is happening to obstruct them from appearing into the light. All and everything freely flows through my awareness to be seen, experienced and released. In fact I might temporarily be overwhelmed by painful emotions or sensations occurring in any present moment—but this in itself offers a beautiful opportunity to allow *everything* to rise up and fall away, like waves in the ocean that appear, rise up, sometimes to become HUGE, then fall again and disappear into the ocean itself. I become the ocean itself, and I discover that in the ocean of Being I am free; lighter, stronger, confident and joyful in the freedom from my previously self-created prison of stories!

Kahil Gibran uses another wonderful analogy to describe solitude—instead of the ocean, the earth: *“Solitude is a silent storm that breaks down all our dead branches. Yet it sends our living roots deeper into the living heart of the living earth. Man struggles to find life outside himself, unaware that the life he is seeking is within.”*

My passageway of aloneness over the months has taken me through a sometimes complex web of confusion, discomfort and the seeming deconstruction of who I thought I was, always interspersed with wonderful flashes of illumination, a falling away of old identifications and fixed ideas about “Ali.” It allows me a constant rediscovery of an intimacy with life, in which there is only a profound experience of Love, a oneness with all that exists.

And Aloneness? What a gift—a blessed and all-encompassing gift that shows me that actually I am never alone and, paradoxically, that I am always utterly and delightfully alone!

The All One: questing, alone in the wilderness

— LYNN RAPHAEL REED

Outside, the garden cries a humid mist of late June rain. Breathing happens. Just so ... everything breathing. I call to mind the Rumi poem: “I open and fill with love and what is not love evaporates.... Poetry, the dear words and images of song, comes down over me like mountain water.” How did it come to this? Flooded with love; drenched in poetry?

The resonance of the Quest still plays me daily, calling me home; as a bell, struck softly, rung hard by the ancient empty teaming of the canyon rims.

It was early in 2014 that I made the decision to undertake a Wilderness Quest in the Utah Canyonlands with Pir Elias Amidon and Elizabeth Rabia Roberts—a decision way outside my comfort zone yet something I felt compelled to do.

The Quest included a nine-day “rite of passage” experience in the desert wilderness. We spent a number of days together in base camp as a small group training in contemplative and traditional ways of being in nature, including a period of solitude, fasting and exposure—followed by three days and nights alone in the desert with no food and only a tarpaulin for shelter.



Once the decision was made to undertake the Quest, a nine-month period of preparation followed and I was fascinated to find how the processes of questing had already begun long before I arrived on the canyon rims. My intentions were initially twofold: firstly to face my fears—with a strong sense that I really wanted to be able to live in the third and final phase of life less limited by fearfulness; and secondly, to further surrender the grip of ego and sense of self. A phrase kept arising: *I yearn to be burnt completely to the ground*. Additional intentions emerged as my preparations continued, including a wish to deepen my connec-

tion with nature, a desire to be more embodied and—as the Quest came closer—a realization that essentially this was a powerful journey of physical, psychological and spiritual healing.

The practices of undertaking a Wilderness or Vision Quest are ancient—with many spiritual traditions seeking what Belden C Lane calls *“the solace of fierce landscapes.”* In the extremes of mountain or desert landscapes we are challenged to rethink our lives, our identity, our relationship with the world. We find out that nature for the most part is indifferent to us. We discover we are not the center of the universe—indeed we are no more than whispers in the wind. Realizing our impermanence and insignificance is truly humbling and liberating. Fasting in this setting becomes a transformative experience encouraging release, emptying, stripping away. All that happens becomes meaningful when we recognize that *“everything... is speaking, in spite of its apparent silence.”* (Sufi Inayat Khan)

And so it was that I found myself on that ancient strata, the dry red rocks—nursed against her hard breast, her hot breath; swept away in muddy rivulets of breaking storm. Serpent light struck the land, demanding my presence—to really arrive in this place, this life, right here, right now - with no equivocation.

- ❖ And, who knew the pre-dawn light could be so tender, so luminous?
- ❖ And who knew how sunrise could pierce my heart again and again: opening me to life; opening me to love?
- ❖ And who knew the symphony of stars, wheeling in arcs of glory, tipping us upside down like swans into the mirror of night?
- ❖ And who knew the beauty of a scorched and blasted tree: silvered needles falling like prayer beads; a welcome to fear?
- ❖ And who knew the mystery of the sanded ledge high up above the canyon floor: sourced through cryptobiotic soil; birthed through limbs of twisted juniper; marked with flags of ruby silk?
- ❖ And who knew the power of ritual: the sacred circle; the smudge stick; the five crystals; the five-element qi gong; the body prayer; the omega wood; the rattle and the drum?

- ❖ And who knew the potency of invocation: the devastation of true speech; the healing salve of grief; the witness of the five jewels; the raven calling his sorrow and his blessing, flying low across my shoulder out into the coral ear of dawn?
- ❖ And who knew the urgency of shamanic lore: the dream of initiation played out in the dark light of a starred vigil; the beetle, the scorpion, the spider—the smallest of creatures, speaking silence?
- ❖ And who knew Spider would come to me every day since: attentive, responsive, creative, kind—laughing her mystery; her divine and devastating web of grace?
- ❖ And who knew that Ibn ‘Arabi might sing through my bones, chiming me endlessly through the final night in sleeping and waking chant: *“Take me away from myself and be my being, then shall You see everything through my eyes”?*
- ❖ And who knew the lunacy of ice: a block, lost from a passing ranger, strung up to give a freezing, diamond shower of cleansing return?
- ❖ And who knew the company of souls: sweet blessings whispered in the ear; *I-thou* relations encircling us in love?

And in that deep experience of questing alone in the wilderness—of being be-wildered over and over again—the dance of annihilation began, with three epiphanic steps: *agrypnia*— attentiveness, attunement; *apatheia*—detachment, equanimity; *agape*—selfless love, divine union, *the ecstasy of I and I entwined.*

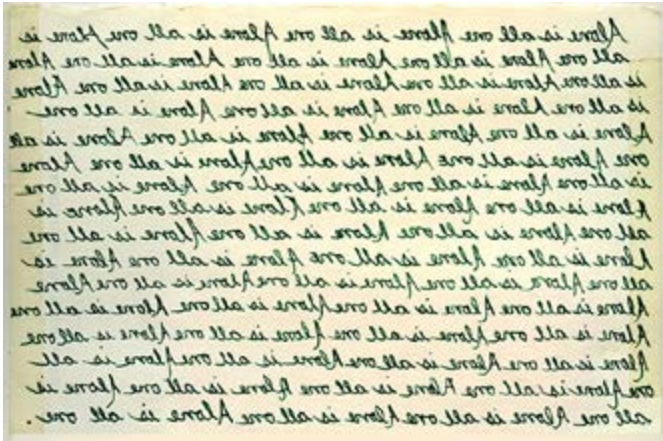
For in truth, in emptying, in opening to aloneness—there is found just This; the All One.

“What was it in the wilderness that gave peace and joy? What was it that came to us in the forest, the solitude? In either case it was nothing else but the depth of our own life, which is silent like the depth of the great sea, so silent and still. It is the surface of the sea that makes waves and roaring breakers; the depth is silent. So the depth of our own being is silent also.

And this all-pervading, unbroken, inseparable, ever-present, omnipotent silence unites with our silence like the meeting of flames.” (Sufi Inayat Khan)

Alone is All One

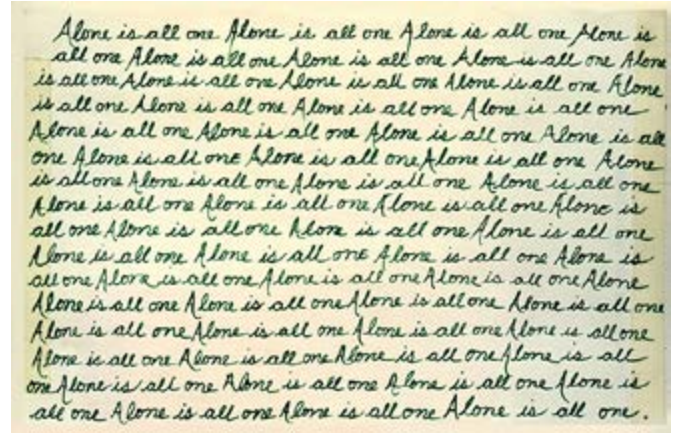
— AMRITA SKYE BLAINE



Forty-five years ago, I penned this card on a hot, sun-filled September afternoon somewhere in Connecticut. I was in the middle of my first and only acid trip, and spent most of the afternoon loose in a vegetable garden, eating tomatoes and other veggies straight from the vine, no hands involved. In this moment I can taste the scents rising from those warm plants! But then, feeling pensive, I sat down with my journal. I often felt I was not understood—that I didn't fit into the culture I was raised in—and the weight of that was obvious to me this particular afternoon.

I'm left-handed, and discovered that afternoon that handwriting, for me, always felt like pushing, whereas for

right-handed people, it is a pulling motion. So to feel that ease, I wrote backwards for the length of this card, so I too could pull my words like the majority of people. Another way that I could fit in. I remember the sensation now, all these decades later—the ease of it. Simply delicious.



But even more curious, considering my understanding today, is what I wrote on the card:

Alone is all one. In truth, there is no separation—even when there appears to be.

No wonder I didn't feel as though I fit into the society I grew up in! There was no one that I could talk to about this knowing. It was many decades before I found like-hearted souls who also know. Some of you are reading this. You know who you are. I bless each of you every day.

Are We All Alone?

— PURAN PEREZ

Sometimes the very same word or phrase can have two quite distinct meanings. Googling the phrase “we are all alone” brings up some very different views found in popular music and literature. Hunter S. Thompson, the iconoclast journalist and author writes:

“We are all alone, born alone, die alone, and—in spite of True Romance magazines—we shall all someday look back on our lives and see that, in spite of our company, we were alone the whole way. I do not say lonely—at least, not all the time—but essentially, and finally, alone.”

It's hard to deny that human existence can feel like being a solitary ME in a vast array of OTHERS, but does Thompson's statement sound a little cold, a little bleak, perhaps a little too true? Being more of a provocateur than a prophet, he may be poking at a soft spot in the

shiny veneer of conventional society more than declaring an ultimate truth. He may actually be provoking us to think about how the fear of being alone propels us into all sorts of associations with others.

Notwithstanding the objective truth or falsehood of his statement, our *lived* experience is probably not that we are alone. A major part of most lives, in fact, involves negotiating a complex web of relationships, trying to balance the demands of family, friends, workplace, and communities with our own needs. So most of us are alone far less frequently than we are showing up in well-populated, interpersonal spaces. Yet we can't argue too strenuously with Thompson if we see an individual's arc from birth to death as a profoundly personal journey. From that perspective, the existential condition of human life is singularity.

Intimacy

The musician Boz Scaggs recorded a popular song in the mid-70's called “We're All Alone.” The title refers to lovers being alone together at last. This aloneness of intimacy

might just as well be spelled, al.one.ness because the lovers, in their besotted state, merge into a wholeness arising from one another's devoted attention. The last verse says:

*Close the window, come alight
And it will be all right
No need to bother now,
Let it out, let it all begin
We're all alone, all alone.*

This moment is so powerful that the world recedes ("close the window") creating a new center of illumination ("come alight"). The freshness of this moment is more than a reset, it is an entirely new world ("let it all begin").

From a perspective Scaggs may or may not have intended,

we could say that when the mystic lover is at last alone—wholly present—with her or his Beloved a similar transformation of reality occurs. This ever-deepening intimacy with the Beloved is the al.one.ness towards which Sufi traditions guide us—*fana fi-Allah*, annihilation in God. (It should be noted that there is an even more radical intimacy beyond that—*fana fi-hak*, annihilation in truth.)

This non-dual effulgence is, in a way, the apotheosis of aloneness. It is not a state of ME absent OTHERS, but the aloneness in which there simply is no OTHER. It may seem paradoxical but, as Elias points out in *The Open Path*, only when we are "all alone" in this sense can we truly be there for our fellow creatures, for our environments and communities. Only then is the full spectrum of love and aliveness available.

Thoughts on Aloneness

— ELIAS AMIDON



*One is one and all alone
and evermore shall be it so.*

— English folksong



In the beginning, they say, God was Alone. His Aloneness was so absolute He began dreaming of all the possible ways He could have company. This universe is His dream. But it hasn't changed the fact that He's still Alone.



Each grain of sand on the beach is alone, just itself. Although it is nestled together with countless others, it is still just itself—alone in its particularity.

In the same way, each of us is alone in our uniqueness. My aloneness is exactly the same as yours. Does that mean we are alone together?



Alone. What a contradictory word! It seems to mean there's no one else around, but then, you can be alone in a crowd.



If you and I were together all the time, we would long to be alone. If we were alone all the time, we'd long to be together.



Loneliness is being alone and feeling bad about it. Solitude is being alone and feeling good about it.



Awareness, when it believes it is a me, can feel alone, lonely, isolated, separate, alienated. When it stops believing it's a me, it doesn't feel that way.



When I think about myself I feel my aloneness. When I stop thinking about myself it's not relevant.



Loneliness is unhappiness. Companionship is happiness. Solitude is for God.



When I asked my mother if she wanted her family with her when she died, she said, "No. I want to die alone. Death is a private thing."



A philosopher once remarked, "Solitude is where one discovers one is not alone." The same could be said about death.



Is the mountain alone? Is the rain?





Kindness

The ocean
of
kindness
surges this way and that,
pulls us down through the undertow,
carries everything away,
brings us
to
devastation.

We may slip into life in our own skin,
but we swim in the same *liqour amnii* as all creation.
And love streams through us,
out through the gills and away.
A wonderful pulsing vein
being opened to openness
again
and again.

So why does the imminence of this
dissolve us in tears?

Is it a visceral response to the loss and longing
caught in the backwash
of
this
wounded world?

Perhaps after all
we are nothing
but
fresh
salt spray.

— LYNN RAPHAEL REED



Aloneness in Wales

Endless compassion in space unbidden
gathering as moss on grey slate wall,
Mysteries dissolved, a residue of falling stars.

This silent companion bears my aloneness,
empty, stark even, yet subtly kind,
the crucible stirred in this stealth of silence.

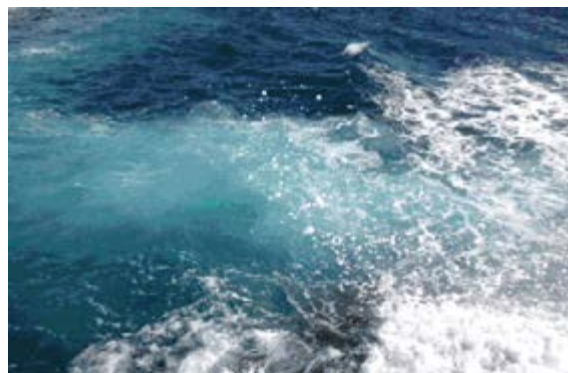
There's nothing to do, no agenda, no striving,
consciousness of the present moment,
its meaning and its annihilation.

Buzzards wheel overhead,
blackbirds, open-throated song, an edge of panic,
fussy finches, darting, swooping.

This singing chorus of harmony
luring me away from painful memories,
circles etched in aloneness, loneliness, strength and wholeness.

Change, resistance, time yet fewer illusions;
A sense of form and space colliding,
co-creating, evolving, forming new terrain.

— KALANDAR WARREN





Inscription

Go to the river, to the sea.
Stand naked in the silt—
weed whipped
ravaged
swept away.

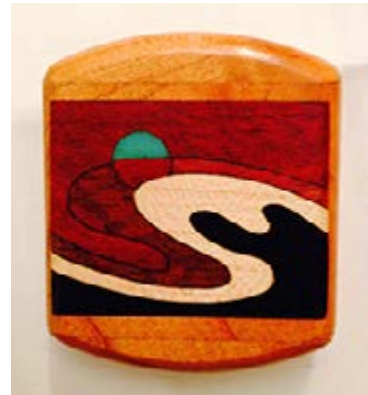
Go to the desert, to the rocks.
Dance empty on the edge—
wind drawn
flayed
blown away

Go to the core, to the heart.
Weep broken in the void—
fire forged
surrendered
burnt away.

Such quests
inscribe
an alchemy
an intimacy,
an amplification of life—

love songs
tattooed indelibly
beneath
the
skin.

— LYNN RAPHAEL REED, 2014



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



Dahan Bakker

Born in Love—as all is

As a young teenager I visited an exposition dedicated to the Sputnik and outer space. This opened for me the universe of the Big. At the beginning of my twenties, I studied Chemical

Engineering: the molecules and electrons brought me in touch with the universe of the Small, and the refineries, pipes and crackers with the concrete. It was clear to me that there is, wherever, **more**: more space, more mass, more desires, more power, justice, abuse, more, more, and more.

In my mid twenties I fell in love, and since then I'm blessed with my partner for life, Mèhèra. We have a son and two grandchildren.

In my professional life I started as a salesman, then marketing researcher and worked my way up slowly to business director in different multinational companies. This path offered the opportunity to live and work in different countries/cultures in Europe, UK, Middle East and the US.

This all contributed to a deep rooted paradox: thinking, feeling and mind are extremely important, and they should not be taken too seriously.

In my thirties Mèhèra and I got to know many remarkable people: Karima, Ida, Shahzadi, Fazal, Puran, Kiran, Karimbakshs, Fadua, Teresa, Isha, Sitara and many more. They all were pointing to the same—The (Sufi) Message.

Over time I got more and more involved with Universal Sufism, which after thirty years culminated in something self-evident: Pir Elias' Open Path—the essence of Sufi Way/Sufism —is my home.

Love has it all—no **more**



Mèhèra Bakker

At the age of eight, I joined a choir and not long after I started with piano lessons. Until then I had been quite bored but from then on I felt passionate for this wonderful new world. The following years, I was fortunate to have the most eminent teachers who supported me in many ways.

During my final exam concert I experienced an epiphany. An incredible power, like an electric current flowed through me ... I wasn't playing ... I was played!

It left me puzzled and on a "high" for weeks.

Around that time, Dahan—my husband—and I read about Sufism. We both felt very attracted and we started to attend Sufi meetings. One day, Murshid Fazal asked us to join the Katwijk Sufi community. We lived there for five years with our young son Taran.

Over time we lived in many countries due to Dahan's career, which left me with the task of finding and creating our homes. It brought me in contact with different cultures, new friends, and opportunities in music.

During the years that Murshida Sitara was Pir she asked me to lead workshops and Zikr training. In these days I also accompanied her on her many travels. It was a great privilege.

When Elias became Pir of the Sufi Way and created the Open Path, it felt as a culmination, bringing many elements of my life in perspective. With it came an understanding of my early epiphany: a total surrender and commitment to our search can bring forth a latent power in us which is not personal but is Life itself.

"To be and not to be" is the answer.

Upcoming Programs 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



Wilderness Quest

A nine-day rite-of-passage in the Canyonlands of Utah
 Elias Amidon and Rabia Elizabeth Roberts
September 25 – October 4, 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



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

Ongoing Programs 2015



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