



# Fresh Rain

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

**WINTER 2022**

**IN THIS ISSUE: Prose by Carol Barrow, Amrita Skye Blaine, Umtul Valeton-Kiekens, and Erica Witt; Poetry by Ayaz Angus Landman, Jeanne Rana, and Leslie Gabriel Mezei**



Dear Friends,

This Winter's theme is **Can We Ever Get Back to Normal?** We received prose contributions from Carol Barrow, Erica Witt, Amrita Skye Blaine, and Umtul Valeton-Kiekens. Poetry includes Ayaz Angus Landman, Leslie Gabriel Mezei, and Jeanne Rana. Enjoy their gifts! And special thanks to Mèhèra who provided Sufi Inayat Khan's writings.

For Spring, let's consider **Doors, Windows, and Gates. Thresholds!** Photos or illustrations are welcome, too.

The beautiful illustrations in this issue were painted by Umtul Valeton-Kiekens.

My apologies to Ayaz Angus Landman—I neglected to include his poems in the last two issues.

Thanks to all who offer their deep hearts for Fresh Rain. Please consider writing for future issues. Share yourself in this way with our larger community! Happy holidays to all.

With love for each one of you,

Amrita  
editor, Fresh Rain: [freshrain@sufiway.org](mailto:freshrain@sufiway.org)



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## Letting Go of Normal

by Carol Barrow

From what I read and witness, “normal,” as it appeared pre-Covid, will not be again. But then, “normal” has changed over the centuries. It’s not normal like it once was for each of us to have to kill an animal to eat or to forage for food and store it for the winter. The holiday that many of us celebrate this time of year is based on a story with events that have never been normal. “Normal” changes over time. “Normal” changed quickly this time.

I worry for the children whose normal was uprooted, thrown into the air like a cyclone, and may still be tossing about. I read about the damage and I listen to my daughter, a teacher of 4th and 5th-graders, tell of a beyond-challenging year—no longer because of teaching on-line, but because of behavioral issues that have arisen during this cyclone of fear and isolation. What will become of these disoriented children as they grow? We need to be there for them.

I entered the Covid era living with my husband; my only job was caring for the household and helping out the Sufi Way. Now, I am separated, with an additional part-time job to help me pay my bills. I’m still trying to find footing. Maybe that is a waste of energy; on my good days, I recognize that there is no place to plant a foot; life is ever-changing, anyway.

Thoughts want to explain it all, want to KNOW what needs to happen, how to navigate this foreign experience. I don’t know where this is all going; it’s not ours to know. But, right now, loving seems the most helpful. Not necessarily *feeling* love (though it’s a lovely feeling), but *giving* and *being* love, generously offering our presence to who and what is around us. Listening—to ourselves and to each other, and responding with kindness, compassion, and love for all. Showing up.

When we do these things, “normal” doesn’t matter. Love and presence, “seeing” another and reflecting their beauty is timeless and healing. It doesn’t even consider what we would call “normal.”

## Can We Ever Get Back to Normal?

by Amrita Skye Blaine

If we look carefully at our direct experience, there is no normal. Sometimes there’s an illusion of stability—for a while, maybe even decades—so we grab it, and label that “normal.” We learn to depend on it. Inevitably, it morphs or falls apart, and we feel unsteady until a “new normal” asserts itself.

We are praying this pandemic life is not the new normal.

I suspect, however, that what we thought was “normal” is gone forever. The nature of how we work has shifted. We added a new word to our vocabulary: Zoom. And then Zoom fatigue. We socialize differently, if we socialize at all. We’re less likely to hug. Caution has filled us.

What is normal, is change. That’s all we’ve got. The manifested universe is constantly in flux, always seeking balance but, like a dancer in motion, must find equilibrium within the fluidity of movement. We humans, who have the unenviable capacity to reflect on ourselves and our world, have trouble accepting and, even more challenging, living in peace with this fact.

So my answer to the question, “can we ever get back to normal,” is no. There’s no going back, either! Where exactly is “back”?



## Life Is Where Your Body Is?

by Umtul Valeton-Kiekens

Life seems to be where your body takes you. Life follows your body like a faithful dog his human.

It is an obvious phenomenon that, when you are traveling, you feel very alive and vibrant because you leave the habitual at home. Besides, every second your body is moving, traveling, it takes, as it were, your soul along. Soul? Or is it life? Or what? The further one travels from home and away from the usual environment the more distant that familiar and safe ground feels. You were "at home" yesterday only and now it appears as a memory as if in a dream. The daily reality of your life, the daily routines one is so familiar with feels now like a shadow of the past. And you know the opposite will happen on your return. Your home will feel home instantly and your journey will be like a shade of memory, like a dream you have had.

What is a normal experience? Is there such a thing as normal? The normal seems to move along with you from instant to instant; this very second moving into the next is real and yet the next second it appears like a dream.

What is it then that moves along, or is "it" moving at all?

We know that silence is a steady factor from where all our experiences appear, from where all life appears, every instant again and again. We may feel and experience silence in between actions, breaths, words, etcetera... and yet it always is this same steady silence. Silence is the very same source from which everything derives and from which all experience derives and disappears in.

Yet something travels along with us, with our bodies, whilst our memories of the familiar are left behind and become dreamlike shadows....

Life is where your body is; it follows your body like a faithful dog. At least for as long one is alive. What other word could we use for life? Soul? Awareness, Presence, Consciousness?

Yet during near-death experiences people have recalled being conscious whilst they felt having left their body.

It is an interesting subject and I do not believe I can find all the answers here. Maybe consciousness remains attached to a body for a while, before it dissolves, as a drop in the ocean, into Silence. Is the ocean/silence consciousness then?

But as we journey along, whether it is through life or in a train, we feel this aliveness coming along with our bodies; in fact we take it for granted they move along

together... is that the same phenomenon? We know too that consciousness, or our essence of heart is not to be called our own! It is linked to and at one with the universal Being, the huge ocean, the ground of all Being, Silence.

I cannot find any difference between life itself and that ground of Being, that huge ocean....

It is only through imagination one can create an image of this huge ocean/silence from which all life derives. This ocean of life spits out with tremendous force a fountain of drops in all sizes and shapes. These drops are enjoying their individuality, whilst all along belonging to and being of the same substance of their source, the ocean/silence.

Inayat Khan writes in his Sufi Message that it is through the law of vibration that life comes into being, that it is that same law which attaches a soul, life as it were, to a body and which creates magnetism between body and soul and all living beings.

What we experience as a day to day normal reality is a reality based on a dream, because as I wrote above, as an example, when you travel, that reality shifts immediately and becomes dreamlike.

The apparent individuality of the drops of the ocean is the dream, the substance is that what moves along, creates life.

We with our minds cannot grasp this truth but only observe it happening with tremendous curiosity and awe....

That familiar feeling of home, knowing that you are of the same substance as the ocean, the source, silence, that life-force, which observes from within, that to me feels like my real home. That is a steady factor but there is nothing normal about it, if ever anything would be....



## Can We Ever Get Back to Normal?

by Erica Witt

I struggled to get away from Normal when I was eighteen, and normal was defined by the small town in the Home Counties of England (the commuter belt around London). I went to University in Liverpool, which in 1964, was definitely Not Normal.

Now I can admit that I do have a craving, now and then, for Normal. Fear of looking old and frail has something to do with it. Needing to feel warm and safe as my brain thins out and perishes. The world having opened up exponentially from the shape and size and technology that governed it in the '60s, is also a part of this. Wearing a mask to go shopping defines me and stamps me as Normal and trying to do my bit for herd immunity. This is laudable and sensible in the face of Covid, but it also challenges my image of myself and my belief system. What are the parameters of Normal now and do I want to sign up for them?

The answer to me is that Normal is as stifling and constricting now as ever.

The Wild in me wants to step out, or perhaps step in, to the next Frontier of belonging and being. That is probably why I sign SUFI proudly and defiantly on any form that requires my (optional) religious affiliation.

It is probably why I go out in the garden at night on a clear night to gaze past the street lights to find the moon and the stars and talk to them.

It is why I have a shrine with a painting of a woman and child in my Art room.

I don't march in marches any more or belong to XR or define myself politically.

But I do hold in my heart and soul a belief and a longing and a belonging to what in the '60s world was a hippie, a free-thinker, a lover. A wild thing!

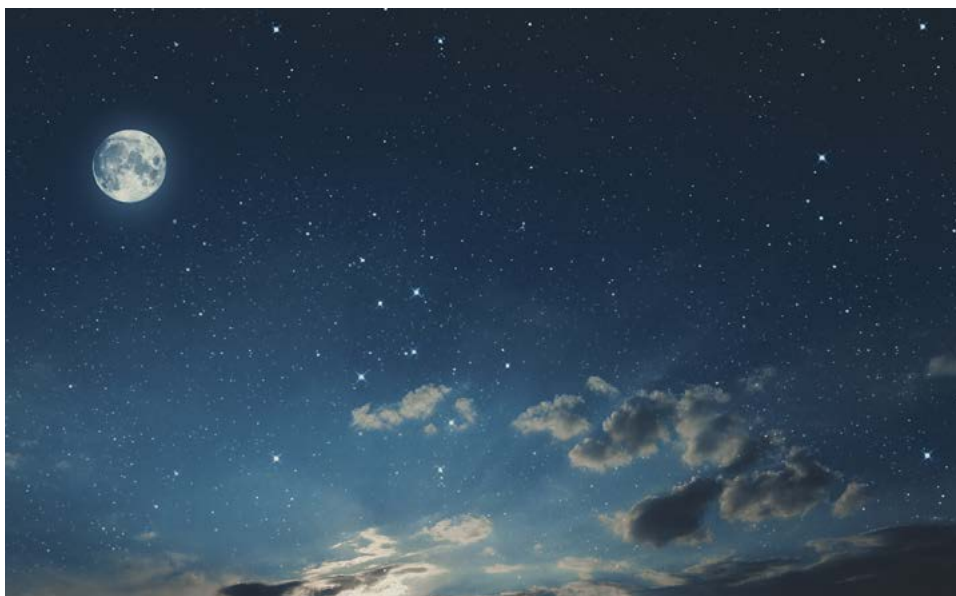
I am a Seeker in her 70s still feeling her way with bare toes for a kind and generous and abundant world of beauty that can hold me and train me and guide me, mean and nasty and angry as I often am, longing for the Oneness of everything to bring a moment's pause and peace.

I am waiting for Good Vibrations, Higher Teachings, the Power of Love, new Energy Potential.

If I have a belief-in-six-words, it is a Belief in the Evolution of Consciousness. Does Normal come first or does it evolve too to catch up and familiarize us with what we are evolving into or toward, to make the changes almost and imperceptibly acceptable?

Is that Normal? If so, count me in. But I believe it is onwards, upwards, not backwards, and it comes in glimpses when I least expect it. Look for it, and it vanishes. I don't know whether it will have supermarkets or refuse collections, wild birds or migrant populations, vaccines or rogue mutants. I doubt it will feel Normal at first feel. Would I feel comfortable if it did? Do I have a chance to find out?

I HOPE SO.



**Only My Heart**

Only my heart  
 Can hold  
 All these contradictions  
 Of shapes  
 And remain at peace  
 Anywhere else  
 I want to use  
 My fists to fight  
 Or my legs to run away  
 But my heart  
 My heart can allow the waves  
 To keep breaking  
 In endless succession  
 Without carrying their weight  
 Allowing gravity and the moon  
 The natural order  
 To return the heaviness  
 To the sea  
 Whilst I  
 I am just left  
 To taste their salty residue  
 And give thanks  
 For no reason at all.

—Ayaz Angus Landman  
*For Be*  
 10/05/20

***Seul Mon Coeur***

*Seul mon coeur  
 Peut contenir  
 Toutes les contradictions  
 De ces formes  
 Et rester en paix  
 Partout ailleurs  
 Je veux utiliser  
 Mon poing pour lutter  
 Ou mes jambes pour fuir  
 Mais mon coeur  
 Mon coeur peut laisser les vagues  
 déferler continuellement  
 En une succession sans fin  
 Sans porter leur poids  
 Permettre la gravité et la lune  
 L'ordre naturel  
 Rendre la lourdeur  
 À la mer  
 Alors qu'il ne me reste  
 qu'à goûter leur résidu salé  
 Et à rendre grâce  
 Sans raison aucune.*

Karim Noverraz provided the French  
 translation of *Only my Heart*

## Shopping for Hope 2021

*How will we ever get back to normal?*

I'm shopping  
for Hope 2021  
a new product I can only buy

online. Amazon Prime  
will deliver free  
by Thursday

but I need it today.  
I want the best Hope  
air purified Covid free

Black Lives Matter approved  
no animal testing  
and definitely organic

free trade  
free range cage free  
with zero trans fats

no preservatives  
or artificial dyes  
and NOT the one packaged in plastic.

Looks like the best deal is  
three for the price of two  
I'll order two for me and one for you

and send it through the mail.  
I hope it arrives  
on time.

—Jeanne Rana  
Sept 23, 2020





Fair economy, fair taxes, guaranteed income  
Universal health, senior-care, and child-care  
Eliminate climate destruction, war, racism  
World citizenship and peace, one family

**The New Normal**

Socially just for all women, children, and men  
Environmentally sustainable for all beings  
Spiritually fulfilling for all  
Unity in Diversity

—Leslie Gabriel Mezei  
November, 2020

**Moments Don't Pass**

What language can I find  
To catch a word unrehearsed  
Between its meaning  
And experience  
To reveal the still pointed  
Moment  
Upon which  
All of time stands

Fooled by the quickness  
Of light  
I imagine the moment  
Has moved on

Only much later  
When the immediate  
Has turned to dust  
Do I realize  
Moments don't pass  
Only things do.

—Ayaz Angus Landman



*“If one studied the transitory nature of life in the world, how changeable it is, and the constant craving of everyone for happiness, one would certainly endeavor at all costs to find something one could depend upon. Man placed in the midst of this ever-changing world yet appreciates and seeks for constancy somewhere. He does not know that he must develop the nature of constancy in himself; it is the nature of the soul to value that which is dependable. But is there anything in the world on which one can depend, which is above change and destruction? All that is born, all that is made, must one day face destruction. All that has a beginning has also an end; but if there is anything one can depend upon it is hidden in the heart of man, it is the divine spark, the true philosopher’s stone, the real gold, which is the innermost being of man.”*

—Sufi Inayat Khan

from [https://wahiduddin.net/mv2/VIVI\\_1.htm](https://wahiduddin.net/mv2/VIVI_1.htm)

*“Things in the world are changeable; they are not to be relied upon. Man sees the vanity of the world; but if he does not see a reality in contrast, he remains intoxicated by the unreality, and tries to get some pleasure from his life, even for a moment. The happiness of this world is something we cannot keep; it is just like the horizon—the nearer you go, the farther it goes. As soon as you get it, you see it is not the thing you wanted. That discontent continues its work till we have found and understood the manifestation of God, in which is hidden the Divine Spirit. God cannot be found in temples, for God is Love; and love does not live in temples, but in the heart of man, which is the temple of God.”*

—Sufi Inayat Khan

*“Supplementary Papers, Brotherhood I” by Hazrat Inayat Khan (unpublished)*

## Upcoming Programs



**Living Sufism 2022**  
**REACHING OUT~REACHING IN**  
 Love in a Divided World  
**First Sundays, January – June, 2022**



**Enter Into Silence**  
 Walking retreat in the Moroccan desert  
**February 12–23, 2022**

