



# Fresh Rain

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

**S U M M E R 2 0 1 8**

**IN THIS ISSUE:** Essays by Pir Elias, Erica Witt, Sabah Raphael Reed, and Chris Covey; Poetry by Jeanne Rana, Carol Barrow, and Suzanne Inayat-Khan



Dear Friends,

Oh my, I need to carefully consider themes. They seem to reflect in my life in a big way.

My required new level of letting go occurred on our European trip—in Scotland I ruptured a disk in my low back and we needed to cut our trip short, missing four days in Holland. But this understanding of our not-twoness made the unexpected journey into severe, unrelenting pain in an unfamiliar country possible. I received wonderful treatment at the hospital on the isle of Skye.

It is important for me not to allow the mind to enter possible nightmare futures. Hopping on the mind train is the source of profound suffering; I simply don't go there anymore. I'm home and healing. And so this issue is late; it couldn't be helped.

Mèhèra Bakker gives us a selection from Sufi Inayat Khan. Thank you, Mèhèra!

Thank you, Carol, for all your assistance gathering writing. I need the help you provide.

The theme for the Fall issue is "**What Really Matters.**" For the Winter issue, "**Slowing Down.**" I look forward to your beautiful and inspiring pieces on these topics.

With love for each one of you,

Amrita

editor, *Fresh Rain*: freshrain@sufiway.org



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## Holding On

by Pir Elias

In spiritual discourse the phrase “letting go” is most often used to describe the release of attachments and identifications that constrict us. “Letting go” is a convenient way to speak of this releasing process, and we use it throughout the Open Path trainings. It points to a radical move in our experience of opening our minds and hearts.

But I’m not sure it’s radical enough. After all, *letting go* presupposes *holding on*, and *holding on* presupposes *something that can hold on*, that is, the self, the me — I hold on to my attachments and so I can let them go.

If we look closely, is this really possible? Think for a moment of something you’re holding on to — for example, a negative self-image or a worry about how you’re seen by others. Now look, *in this moment*, to how you manage to hold on to that image or concern. How do you do it? *What* is holding on to *what*?

It’s important to investigate how this holding on process is happening *in this moment* because if we think about it we can get tangled in conjecture — for example: *Well, I hold on to my worry about how I am seen by others because I’m afraid I’ll be rejected, and that’s what happened to me as a child...* etc. We’re spinning out a story here, but avoiding looking directly at how “we” are holding on to “it” (the worry) in this moment.

Those of us familiar with the self-inquiry process of the Open Path or other nondual approaches will appreciate the bluntness of this recognition: it doesn’t seem possible to find an “I” that is capable of holding on to or letting go of an attachment, nor does it seem possible to find the attachment — in this case, the worry. The worry is a momentary feeling. When we look for it, it’s already gone.

The only thing that we know is happening is what is appearing now. Right now, I’m writing these words and you’re reading them. Actually, that’s not even true — writing these words is happening and reading them is happening, no you or I needs to be inserted in the equation. This is true for everything — speaking, thinking, feeling, standing, walking, looking, touching, resting, sleeping — reality is a gerund!

I suppose we could add that when *holding on* is happening or *letting go* is happening, that’s what’s happening too. Fair enough, but we have to be careful here about falling into our old habits of conceptualizing things. The key is to just be here, a happening in the universe. Whatever “you” are is simply the current gerund. No “you” is needed.

Reading this and trying to make sense of it, you might have the uneasy feeling that to simply be the gerund of the moment would mean that you would betray the “you of you,” the subjective experience of your particularity. Indeed, there is a kind of vanishing that happens, but it’s a vanishing of self-positioning, not a vanishing of experience or responsiveness. Everything that’s occurring keeps occurring, but you’re not an element in the way. Feelings like worry or anxiety may still happen, but they don’t last because there’s nothing for them to hook to.

To the extent that the notion of “I” vanishes in the moments of our lives, an exquisite intimacy is revealed. Each moment is just what it is, and “I” am intimate with “it,” though there is no I, no it, just this intimacy. Perhaps welcoming the vanishing of the “I” again and again, whenever we condense into its mirage, is the simplest and most radical experience of what we call *letting go*.



*You are my life  
It is in you that I live  
From you I borrow life and  
To you do I give my soul and spirit  
You I adore  
I live in you so do I live ever more*

*You are in me and in you do I live  
Still you are my King and my sins you forgive  
You are the present and future and past  
I lost myself but I found you at last.*

— Sufi Inayat Khan

## Bird Wings

by Erica Witt

Letting go is sometimes momentarily outside time, a great epiphany of surrender, awakening and release. More often, it seems to me, it is one part of the unceasing circuitry of paradoxes: holding on versus letting go. The lifetime learning is how to coordinate opposing forces, how to learn to fly!

This becomes increasingly apparent to me as I age. My particular version of aging is Parkinson's Disease, a neurological condition where the uptake of dopamine decreases and a part of the brain withers. It is also called a Movement Disorder although I think an opposite description is equally relevant, a Stillness Over-Order. Muscles, the hands, the legs, the bowels, the face, become disorganized and uncoordinated, or rigid and still. Somewhere in the brain is a battle within its own signaling system of binary "no:yes" as to how to send the command to hold on at all costs or capitulate and let go. My hand shakes involuntarily as just one signal from the depths of my brain shows the outside world just how complicated the circuitry of communication can be. Each movement, each shake, involves a decision, no longer discreetly automatic.

There is a hollow ring and a sinister edge to this. Sometimes I feel and act "normal." I find myself, without realizing it, suddenly behind a muscular wall of braced attention, a tensile deflection of anything soft and kind that comes towards me. I used to call this shyness or awkwardness, a disappearing act to deflect the glare of attention until my wild side was ready for a brief skirmish. Now it's an involuntary withdrawal from contact called a Disease.

The tightness of my description gives the game away. Too much emotion squeezed into as few and brutal words

as possible. Between the words is a world of openness and perception and emotional availability squeezed into cramped space, breathless, tight, contracted. That's how I sound to myself. Kindness unhinges me, someone noticing a sign of life, a twinkle in my eye, something struggling to be said even though the conversation has by now moved on.

How terrible it must be to be paralyzed, vegetative, reduced to frantic signals trapped behind blank inertia. So, when I catch myself tightened and withdrawn, involuntary muscles, dopamine deprived, holding me back, I reach as best I can for the equal and opposite reaction, the letting go option. Here I feel free to join life as a full participant, enjoying every moment, laughing, crying, flying. Kind and free and fearless as can be.

I practice these moments as often as I can. Moments of awareness at the intersection between this and that, yes and no, contraction and expansion. "The first moment." A self-awareness that attempts to avoid self-pity or self-absorption, loitering instead at the crossroads, keeping an eye open for Grace. Catching the updraft like a magnificent bird, or missing it and floundering all too often in the after tow.

The struggle I am having, as with any struggle of opposites, provides a particular focus, an apprenticeship, a learning curve. A chance to catch the Now as it flies caught in eternity's sunrise.

Or to quote the poet Rumi (as translated by Coleman Barks)

*Your hand opens and closes and opens and closes.  
If it were always a fist or always stretched open,  
you would be paralyzed.*

*Your deepest presence  
is in every small contracting and expanding,  
The two as beautifully balanced and coordinate  
As bird wings*



## Clearing

by Sabah Raphael Reed

Pir Elias recently reminded us on the “Continuous Realization” program of some simple but profound meta practices to nurture awakening.

I have been meditating on one of these practices, asking “Am I full of myself?” The word that has been shimmering as “lectio divina” in this question is *full*—and I have been noticing the multiple ways in which I experience fullness, and the uncomfortable quality of this state: feeling full of self-ness, stories, preoccupations, expectations, judgments, disappointments, excess food and drink and stimulants of many kinds, full beyond satisfaction ... full of experience itself.

At the same time the meditation has illuminated possibilities beyond fullness; not in a dualistic sense, as the distinction between full and empty implies but rather, when we release or soften our tendency to “fill up” then what do we find? Perhaps spaciousness, ease, right-relations, freshness, spontaneity, flow ... something akin to *clarity*.

This last word evokes the image of unconditioned reality as a clearing in which all conditioned elements arise, and invites relaxation into knowing ourselves as indivisible from that clearing—both embodied form *and* pure presence in intimate relation.

The significance of “clearing” has come into focus for me over the past month in a very particular way, as I have been helping to clear my late father-in-law’s house and garden. The more we have sifted and sorted, the more we have cut back and swept aside, the more we have released items into the world for recycling and renewal, the more we have let things go—the more spaciousness has emerged, and the more numinosity has arisen from the items that remain and from a fresh capacity to see the person that he was in new and clearer ways. In a sense “letting go” has transfigured into “shining forth.”

How could this be so? It is as though the physical act of clearing has illuminated awareness of reality as a clearing in which all objects show up, and the space around the objects allows both the objects and the space to mutually co-exist, to know each other from the inside out and to shine in equal measure.

This inter-penetration of form and formlessness as sacred revelation is something our ancestors have understood since the dawn of humanity. The earliest holy places situate forms in space in particular ways, where the form is manifested by the space contained by and surrounding it e.g. stone circles, cromlechs, rock tombs, pyramids.



Creative expression of many kinds equally depends upon such juxtaposition of form and formlessness in intimate relation; notes in music, words in poetry, brush strokes in painting, movement in dance—all shining forth from the spaciousness in which they arise and to which they bend in blessing. In Japanese culture, the term *ma* beautifully encapsulates the profundity of this relational void.

So, does the movement of “letting go” serve us well in awakening to this ever-present pure presence coterminous with form? Whilst we can use the concept of letting go helpfully to remind us to release fixation or thought streams, for example in our meditation practice, there is also some limitation to its usefulness e.g. the injunction to “let go” can become an imperative implying willful agency, with a self or ego in charge of its own liberation.

Equally one might say there is *nothing but* letting go—all else is illusion. As Henri Bergson reminds us, “There is no feeling, no idea, no volition which is not undergoing change every moment.” Every moment is self-liberating—instantaneously dissolving as the “force that through the green fuse drives the flower” constantly flows.

This is why I love Pir Elias’s reminder to “relax” as the term to characterize the internal movement of opening; we are not making *This*; we cannot destroy or lose *This*; we only need to remember *This*. But it is also why the word “surrender” calls to us with such power. For in that instance of relaxing, there is also an exquisite sensation of falling backwards into the arms of the ever-present Beloved. As Rumi names it: “Feel the motions of tenderness around you. The buoyancy.”

Ultimately “letting go” and “being held” are one, in the ineffable Womb of Love.

“There is only Love that made us, only Love”  
And you in the vast silence like an ocean without water,  
Like rain before rain—  
like an unbroken mirror

You in the Womb of Love.

(*In the End: the Beginning* by Jay Ramsay)

## The Good Life

by Chris Covey

What is the good life? Just about everyone with a name has had a go at this one.

Quantifying such questions has afflicted me since I was a teenager. Is it in the right course of study? The right job? The right career? The right friends? The right professional network? The right social contributions? The right partner? The right socioeconomic status? The right lifestyle? The right community? The right ethic? The right spiritual ideal?

Does it even exist?

I did my best to heed Rilke's famous advice to his young poet friend: "...have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and ... try to love the questions themselves.... Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them.... Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer."

But I was impatient. I wanted to live wholly, fully, now. Why wait for some elusive point far in the future for the life I envisioned to materialize, where I could finally feel connected, at home in my own skin? A direct path to realization appealed to me immensely, but it was no substitute for day-to-day living. Messes I made still remained until I cleaned them up.

My human desire for a "Goldilocks Zone" in every aspect of life welled up from deep social conditioning, and also from a biological imperative to reach a place of safety, peace, rest, and equilibrium. To find it, I sought out teachers and engaged in study, reflection, contemplation, and stillness. But even stillness doesn't remain still for long when everything is shifting, turning, and evolving.

With every new age and stage of my life, vestigial answers to my existential questions have shed from me like snakeskin, often with alarming results. What was once dear has fallen away, exposing my ignorance and leaving me feeling foolish, deceived, credulous, naive, naked, and alone. After each shattering, I have attempted to refashion a new identity from the meaningful memories and fragments of the old one. But the old one died precisely because it no longer served life. Somehow life continuously resides in the emptiness of the unknown that I cannot help but lean into.

In my search for the good life I have found solace in fellow travelers and restful way stations—I've even built one to live in—but gripping onto comfort and familiarity only squeezes the goodness out of them faster. Along

the way, I've had to accept the harshest essence of truth, the source of all beauty and pain. Everything ends. Even ideals are replaceable.

Right now, this truth of endings stings most in the context of spiritual community. I am alone in this journey, even when others are present. I have touched the One Being and sung my heart alongside dear friends, but in almost all cases I am a generation younger. Where will my sangha be when the Old Ones are gone and only I remain? Will I become an Old One to myself when there are no more young ones, no more sangha? How am I to endure being alone with the Alone then, but to accept that everything I have known, can ever know, is already gone, gone, completely gone away?

*Gate, gate, paragate, parasamgate...*

It helps me to remember that a fresh-skinned snake must also relearn its world with each molting, rediscover sensation, flexibility, movement, and direction. And that once reborn, the vulnerability of being so new again, so disoriented, cannot help but encourage some self-protection. But self-protection exists not for its own sake. It is a temporary measure to facilitate healing. Self-protection becomes the enemy and antithesis of living if prolonged artificially through a devotion to my own comfort and familiarity.

Philosopher Henry James' father once wrote to him: "The natural inheritance of everyone capable of spiritual life is an unsubdued forest where the wolf howls and the obscene bird of night chatters." I cringe when I read these lines, because I hear the truth in them. It is a grueling, arduous journey to keep facing what life serves, one of constant transformation and precious little reprieve. The way forward is unyielding.

There is no "good" or "right" life in any absolute teleological sense, as I may have once imagined. There is just the goodness of living: the precious few moments, the opportunities to open wider, to glimpse more of Everything through the ferocious onslaught of hurt and joy.

I don't know how many answers I may live into one day, but I do trust Rilke when he says that "Life is in the right, always."



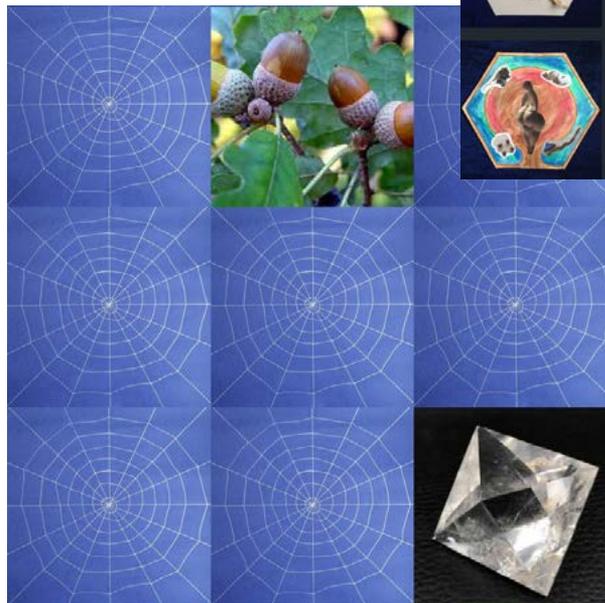
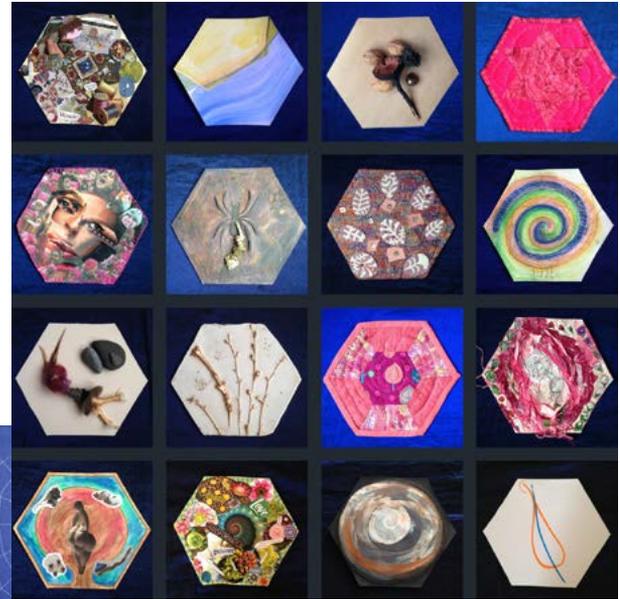
## The Sophia Wisdom Project

Over the past eighteen months we have been part of a creative, collaborative and contemplative enquiry called the Sophia Wisdom Project. Opening our hearts to Divine Presence through the doorway of the feminine has brought new insights, blessings and wisdom to be shared. The enquiry also has wonderful resonance with the origins of the word Sufi, which some ascribe to the Greek word for wisdom, *Sophia*.

Out of the project we have created a multidimensional quilt and associated website that allows you to explore the holographic nature of this wisdom stream at your leisure in a playful and interactive way. There are images, reflective writings, poetry, resources and practices on offer and we hope that you find something in this weaving to enjoy!

[www.sophiawisdomproject.co.uk](http://www.sophiawisdomproject.co.uk)

Erica Witt, Sabah Raphael Reed and Suzanne Cowderoy



**approaching my 75th birthday**

what makes me most afraid  
     is not being dead  
         but the dying  
 I love my body  
     my sturdy strong young one  
         locked somewhere in here  
         like Merlin trapped in the tree  
 I have glimpses of that strange wild child  
     fearless warrior's  
     power and movement  
 she does not appear in my bathroom mirror  
 I see beauty there  
     of a different order  
         the roses of November

since my warrior is caged  
 I've learned to sing  
     and breathe  
         and appreciate beloved community  
 I've given up alienation  
 no longer time for angst  
 raging lusts  
     have settled  
         into steady loves  
 I'm learning who I am.  
 These are  
     I realize  
         compensations

mirror mirror on the wall  
 shows me a fading woman  
 moving quietly  
 but  
     a sparkle in the eye  
         a smile  
 knowing I am not alone  
 never alone now  
 knowing I belong  
 finally



Jeanne Rana  
 Feb 10, 2017

## Letting Go

To what can I hold on?

Is there anything that I have which can be let go?

This belief, that desire, this pain. Already gone.

Everything is constantly becoming what's next.

Day gives way to fiery sunset, then to the quiet of night.

In-breath will always relax and breathe out.

I try to hold your beautiful smile so I can feel love forever,

but it slips through my fingers like a handful of water,

into the stream of now, of This, of...

Carol Barrow

June, 2018



**the blue of distance**

*the blue of distance:  
if you can own your longing  
in the same way you own the beauty  
of that blue you can never possess  
— Rebecca Solnit*

that old ache  
for the horizon  
the ship  
heading out of the harbor  
the glimpse of  
blue  
infinity

sunsets in winter over the bay  
burst pink and orange  
As they darken  
late twilight goes to black  
then city lights and stars

we turn to dinner and tv  
forget for awhile  
as the sky darkened  
a wish  
to travel  
alone in a small boat  
out across the waters  
into the end of sunset  
into the deep blue

Jeanne Rana  
Feb 6, 2017



**Letting Go—Call and Response**

Letting go of sugar.  
 Letting go of cigarettes.  
 Letting go of wine.  
 The meat, the butter, the carbs—  
 Letting go of all the bad, bad things.

Letting go of being young and lovely.  
 Letting go of ripeness.  
 Letting go of health and competence  
 And the zaza zaa that always worked before—  
 Letting go of all of the good, the oh so good, things.

Letting go of needs and wants,  
 judgements and preferences,  
 Fixations and conditions.  
 Letting go of thisness and thatness,  
 of certainty and of knowing who and where I am.  
 Letting go of being more (or less) of anything,

is that it?



Dear girl, no.  
 Please stop!  
 Untie the of!  
 Let go of letting go!  
 It's not a thing to do.

Letting go is the current in your breath,  
 Letting go is how your eyes smile  
 Letting go is in the sun rising, the moon's wax and wane.  
 Letting go is alive, simply occurring,  
 Without you doing ANYTHING.

And even at the end of this you-time,  
 letting go will simply  
 And naturally  
 And easily  
 happen  
 and  
 continue  
 ever  
 on.

Murshida Suzanne Inayat-Khan  
 May 2018

**what empties the mind?**

a flash  
an instant of blessed nothingness

then the machinery  
creaks into gear  
and off we go again  
on to the next adventure

the flash cannot be anticipated  
it happens  
when you are planning dinner  
making the bed  
or putting gas in your car  
the moving numbers on the pump  
begin to go backwards  
or twirl at random  
and instead of thinking  
"What's happening here?"  
the mind goes blank  
everything stops

the smell of gasoline  
pulls you back  
Oh yes!  
just now I was filling the tank  
driving to the city

you cannot  
anticipate  
or prolong  
the flash  
but for a moment  
the sun is warm  
the breeze is soft  
the clouds drift  
just so

for an instant  
all is  
all right

Jeanne Rana  
June 2, 2017



## Upcoming Programs 2018



### Labor Day Weekend Retreat

with Pir Elias  
on Love and Nonduality  
Walton, Oregon USA

**August 31 – Sept. 3, 2018**



### Continuous Realization

Advanced Six-Month Retreat with Elias Amidon  
Buckland Hall, Wales, UK

**October 7 – 10, 2018**



### Introduction to the Open Path

with Pir Elias  
Bristol Theosophical Society  
Bristol, England

**October 5 – 6, 2018**



### Open Path Training

Six-Month Training in Nondual Realization with Pir Elias  
Himmelreich Retreat Center  
Lindau, Germany

**April 26 – 29 and October 18 – 21, 2018**

