



Fresh Rain

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

FALL 2018

IN THIS ISSUE: Essays by Puran Lucas Perez, Basheera Kathleen Ritchie, Sibylle Baier, Michael Wenger, Binah Taylor, and Emer O Laoghaire; Poetry by Yona Chavanne, Kiran Rana, Carol Barrow, and Jeanne Rana



Dear Friends,

The weather is turning here; I can smell it in the air. This seasonal change—knowing days are shortening—life is shortening, always brings up **What Really Matters** for me. When you send in writing, each one is a gift I get to open. Please enjoy the selections.

Thank you, Carol, for all your assistance in encouraging people to write. You do a beautiful job!

For the Winter issue, the theme is **“Slowing Down.”** I look forward to your thoughtful pieces on these topics. The Spring theme will be “Patience.”

With love for each one of you,

Amrita

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Really Unreal

by Pura Lucas Perez

To explore the question, “What really matters?” shouldn’t we begin by understanding what “really” means? If we are seeking to base our lives in a dependable truth, don’t we need to do that on the solid ground of reality? I would say yes, but alas, my fellow travelers, reality can be so unreal.

Take, for example, how transient it is. The only thing that is not constantly changing is the fact that everything is constantly changing—caught in the one-way river of time. In a way, this makes the reality we live more like a tumbling brook than a stable plot of land.

The human organism, however, needs reliable ground to stand on, so we tend to downplay the transience of everything and form a credible reality around the things that are truly important to us. Thus the professional gambler lives in a different world than the Mother of a mountain top abbey. It’s not just that their environments are radically different, their psycho-spiritual centers, the bases of their realities are worlds apart.

Yet, which of those things that were of great importance at one time in our lives still are or will continue to be so? For a few months when I was seventeen, all that mattered was an old Plymouth and the status and freedom that car conferred. But how real is something that is quickly gone?

Another unmasking of reality happens when we realize the perfidy of one’s point of view, the treachery of knowledge. Our reality is made of what we know, of what we believe we can depend upon. It is the summation of all our knowledge. Consider that in order to know something we must frame it and name it—applying known language and constructs to build a faithful *instance* of that thing in our personal mind worlds. Then, what we know is not the 360 degree, essential reality of that thing but our limited internal representation of it.

Even my experience of my own children is incomplete—do I *really* know who they are? There are no beings I love more or know better, yet I’ve only ever known them *through the frame* of parenting. For all the intimacy and importance of these relationships, the parenting frame has its limitations, its blind spots. All we ever know—the bedrock of the reality we live—is subject to the limitations of our framing, making it a partial reality at best.

The third way in which reality is betrayed is by the inadequacy of language as the primary means for comprehending it. Imagine you’re walking in a forest. Will you register an owl in a tree if you don’t say (out loud or silently), “Oh, an owl”? The reflection of light from an owl in a tree may reach your visual cortex without your conscious recognition of it, but then it will not be added to your moment-by-moment aggregate of experience. Without the specific awareness carried by the identifier, “owl,” the reality of your walk will not include an owl.

Problem is, I can only identify what I already have a name for. I can only see what I am equipped or prepared to see. I don’t so much look around and define what I see, as see what I have already defined. If I don’t have an identifier for it, it is unlikely that I will apprehend it. Again, a fragment of reality is all that is ever available to us.

Where does this leave us, my fellow travelers? Does the unreality of our reality obviate the possibility of caring deeply and living in the service of what really matters? Is the takeaway here that our inability to know reality in an absolute sense renders our thoughts and actions meaningless? And once we’re done philosophizing about reality are we not still left unsure of what really matters? I defer to my late friend and teacher, the founder of the Sufi Way, Fazal Inayat-Khan. He addressed this question head on and definitively: What really matters? Nothing. Everything.



Reminders for Worriers

by Basheera Kathleen Ritchie

It's a perfect day. The kind of day no one could disagree with. It's not too hot. It's not too cold. Blue skies. Flowers and birds. And I am joyful in it.

For years I have been beset with worries. First they were business worries, but I closed my business. Now there are worries about jobs and money and the health of friends and family: a sister-in-law given a terminal cancer diagnosis, a father with creeping dementia, my mother, alone for the first time, needing my support. Worries about my own small physical problems. Worries about the country. There's a lot to worry about at my age.

So today, I am filled with gratitude. Because today I sit on the deck among the zephyrs and the birdsong and write about the most important thing.

Realizing how often I allow a sense of panic to relegate pure awareness to secondary importance, I developed these "Reminders for Worriers."

- Stress and worries ebb and flow. When they crescendo, my body's reaction eclipses the needs of the day. I fall back on "the one rule," allowing and feeling discomfort. The lack of resistance dissipates the reaction and I slip back into the day.

- I feel emotional but don't know why. I inquire of myself, "What are you holding up?" Some fixation is being challenged. The inquiry helps me realize and identify it. I struggle to hold up the framework of a house. Letting go, I step away. The structure falls in a jumble of two by fours ... and then there is peace, and relief. My effort is not required.
- Worries of a lesser nature are clouds drifting across a clear blue sky. A dreaded event is a storm approaching. The weather comes and goes but the clear blue sky remains.
- Having loosened my attachments I become "a clearing in which the world shows up" (Heidegger). Leaving the clutter for the clearing leads me straight to pure awareness. Similarly, Rumi is the host of a guesthouse. There, all guests are welcomed.
- The move from acceptance to welcome brings magic and mystery. Each moment is born fresh. The calm surface of a lake reflects many things and reveals its depths. Yet winds may ruffle it, leaves may fall on it, fish may jump in it. The surface inquires, using Elias' question, "What wants to happen here?" then welcomes what manifests.

Such moments are a healing sunbreak in a cloudy day. I lose interest in my worries and remember the story of a Chinese monk. To the tales of his accusers he replies merely, "Is that so?"



What Really Matters

by Sibylle Baier

What really matters; how would one know? I began to rummage, sense, make space.

Later that evening, *Consent* appeared. Consent to the divine indwelling, *yes to life*, not in conflict to creation, especially after the dark weeks. Gratitude. Or, with less large words—lest we become attached to them—we are a piece of life, and its magnanimity grants us, for a very short time, the illusion of being an individual. How can we not marvel in that and say yes, quickly, completely.

Next day I asked my husband. He smiled and said, “Remember, with our friends, thirty or so years ago, we usually would conclude such talk with ‘everything matters, nothing matters.’ However, if I have a bad headache, all that matters is that the headache should be gone.”

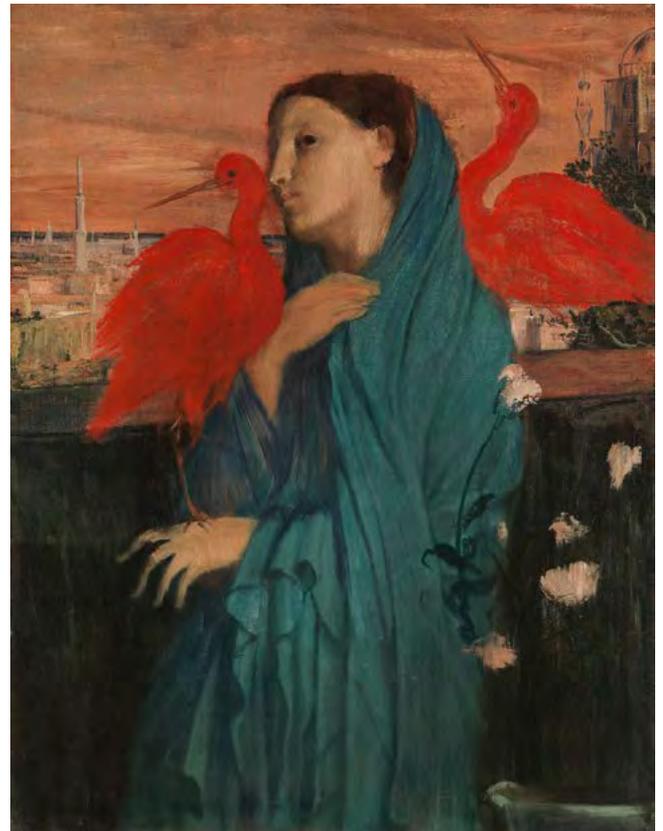
One of our grandsons likes to make intricate origami and there is a small, orange expandable piece on our kitchen table. That morning it occurred to me what really matters could be to *consent* to the infinite folding and unfolding of a cosmic origami: no form ever static, ever there really, but moving, folding, unfolding constantly.

Our other grandson, sixteen, offered: “Regardless if there is ultimate meaning, it does matter how **one is** [I’d prefer “we are”] with each other, with the world. Although nothing might matter, it is important to treat everything as if it mattered.”

August 15. We sit on a deck under a crescent moon in the early evening, my grown daughter and a friend, our feet in an Epsom salt water bath. We are knitting, and after a while, the question of what really matters slips out and we are in the thick of it: What you put out into the world. How we affect other people, creation. It is part of every single thing. Well yes, but first what matters is to make sure shelter and food is granted. Once we have survival covered, that is when we get into trouble and make it up! So, what really matters is the source of what makes you decide what matters! It is awareness.

After this evening talk, What Really Matters was out of my hands: the question kept asking itself to almost everyone I’ve come in contact with since—family, friends,

neighbors, strangers, in town, in the forest. And all who were asked, instantly became alert, tremendously curious, grateful, eager to speak an answer to themselves, and showed no shyness whatsoever. Looking back, it seems to me as if the question had secretly been long, long anticipated, hoped for, a treasure to be lifted, finally. What a solace we are to each other in this sudden connectedness, obliterating the boundaries of one’s machinations of aloneness or individual defenses; however briefly, it is uplifting. All answers are true and shall be true. For the brief time of the question being asked and answered, it dawned on me that we are transparent to each other, friends to each other’s and therefore our own daily, momentary concerns, suffering, delights, humanness. One friend wrote her answers in lengthy invocations, almost prayers, per email, saying finally, ...“hence a new write up, and another one tomorrow and the day after....”



The Most Important Thing

by Michael Wenger

It happened at that time, when the situation urgently called for some change. Chaos was knocking at the door, we got used to anxiety and in some places even to daily terror, governments seemed to act without thinking, without gentleness, and without their commitment to serve. Yes, it was urgent.

So Gina, the turtle—she was clearly the wisest and oldest among us—called for a general reunion. And they all came: from the four corners of the world and all the other dimensions, they came flying, swimming, walking on two, four or more legs, the non-physical beings, fairies and fantasies, were on time as always. The sun, the moon, fire, water, air, space and time were the first to arrive, and when finally the sloth was seen, Gina the turtle asked John the elephant to use his trunk to create silence.

“We need to find a good direction” Gina the turtle was convinced— “and therefore we have to agree what really matters.”

Everybody agreed they had to agree.

“ I know what it is ! I know what it is! It's love, it's love, it's love that really matters,” barked Barry the dog, impatient as always.

“Oh no, it's peace,” Linda the cow affirmed with a joyous smile, “Just come up and visit me and my sisters on the mountain meadow one summer evening and you will know peace.”

“Yeah peace, peace, c'mon you phony-holy mammal...” Donald Duck had appeared out of nowhere. “You cannot eat peace, there is no peace when I am hungry! What really matters is my coffee and croissant in the morning.” Ashamed of their uncle, Huewy cried out: “Uncle no, it is taking care of others that matters!”

“Yes” Dewey added, “but also taking care of the world.”

“Yes, yes, but first you must take care of yourself.” Louie added.

Gina the turtle admonished all to be reasonable and respectful while discussing and asked Sophy the owl to gently share her wisdom: “I have seen the nights of all continents; I have listened to love whispers and tears of kings and beggars; I was sitting with the philosophers in Athens and Isfahan, and therefore I know that all that matters is to remember God, to remember that we are one.”

“And what about compassion?” asked my sister. For a few moments there was a respectful and thoughtful silence

interrupted by a sudden “YES!” The monkeys all at once had started shouting, “but what about touching the other, what about relating, having friends, having fun? That is what makes life worth living.”

“Maybe,” the squirrel's soft voice was heard, “ but we also need innocence, morality and ethics. There is nothing that matters more than that.”

Finally John the Elephant with his legendary clarity asked to speak. “I believe it depends on the point of view. Take antibiotics, for example: they are good for humans yet bad for viruses.”

“Well said, dear John,” answered Kahn the popular wild boar who loved to sing and all kinds of art, “but doing the beautiful is an overall helpful indication for acting in a way that really matters.”

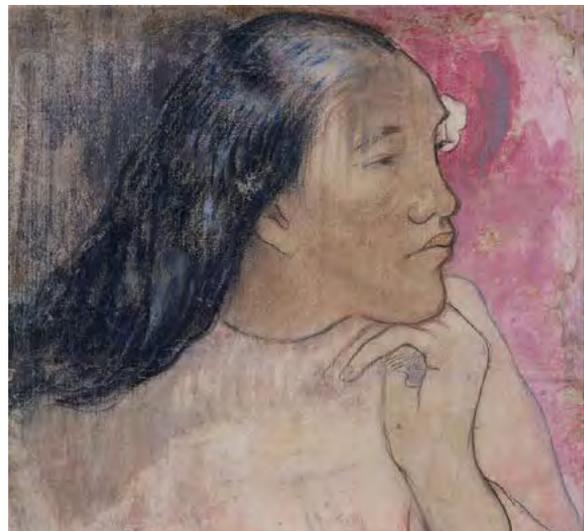
After many hours trying to decide what really matters, the rare snow leopard came forward, looked shortly at each of them and declared: “Never lose the contact with yourself.”

This moment felt like silk. The unicorn appeared in everybody's mind and all were magically touched by the indescribable charm of its voice: “Dear friends, let us be honest, we do not really know what really matters. Personally I believe, what really matters is that what is. Yes, that what is, right here right now.”

Gina the turtle felt the shift after the Unicorn's word's and wisely suggested to the whole reunion:

“Let us all go home and meditate on this old Zen saying: ***The most important thing is to discover what is the most important thing.***”

Feeling inspired they all went back to where they came from ... and lived happily ever after.



What Really Matters

by Binah Taylor

I am strolling up the tree-lined rambla with my *nieta*—granddaughter—on a steamy midsummer morning. Already an ambitious walker at nearly two, she weaves in and out of thronging tourists who are here for the arts festival and the usual Dali attractions. Signs of Figueres' son are everywhere, although reportedly he did not even like his birthplace and it probably did not like him when he was alive.

Today I must focus on my charge who is tearing through the town as if it were her backyard. I feel acutely both my age and responsibility for her as I pick up the pace wondering how best to reel her in without upset. But she has already stopped to look at the leaves which, strangely, are dropping even before June is out. She has set eyes on a particularly colorful red-veined leaf with three sections like a clover, the ends curling, a smooth stalk. She picks it up examines it carefully turning it over with notable delicacy, and then lifts it up to show me with a gleam in her eye. I crouch down and in this moment it is just us in the dappled light examining this beautifully formed leaf—our heads so close, almost nose to nose, our fingers brushing, exchanging oohs and aahs of shared delight in whispers.

In this moment, this most precious moment, I am transported to another time long ago but now potently present, where a WW2 British spy was being held captive in a dark basement in solitude after being tortured by the Gestapo. One day a leaf had floated in through the bars and this became her treasured lifeline to the outside world, where there was love, sunlight, and freedom. As a teenager I read (and sobbed) about how she found a safe place to keep this leaf so she could hold it each day and dream of her freedom. Then she would imagine she dressed her children for school, packed their lunches and waved them on to the bus. This was her daily ritual and what really mattered to her.

My *nieta* is off leaving me with the leaf; for her that moment has been discarded for the next. How free she is! My Proustian reverie has rendered me slow to the mark. I quickly place the leaf alongside its siblings and take off after her. She has started running past the edge of the rambla having spotted the scaled-down replica of a London bus, already a favorite. Her mission is to get to the driver's seat before someone else. My job is to make sure no one puts a coin in the slot so it doesn't rock. Then I am to squeeze into the back so no passengers can get in and she can boss the space. It is a complete territorial takeover and I am her meek accomplice.

Today she commands the bus for a good fifteen minutes, flashing me gorgeous smiles as she sounds the silent horn with her own sound effects. Other children are now exerting pressure and after terse negotiations and bribery of ice cream she relinquishes the driver's seat and steps down.

As we walk hand-in-hand to the ice cream parlor, the scent of our sweet intimacy makes me feel heady. Nothing else matters, only this.



What Really Matters

by Emer O Laoghaire

My days are taken up preparing for Culture Night on September 21st. We are twenty women and men working with a professional dance company and will have three performances on the night. Most of them have worked with this choreographer before and I am the newbie. Over five weeks we work and dance, twenty bodies moving harmoniously to create a story, a journey for the audience. We love what we do. There is a palpable sense of the joy of movement and engagement with the creative process. I am amazed how patiently the choreographer directs, corrects and works us for hours and hours.

Hazrat Inayat Khan says what really matters is to love and to allow that love to manifest in our lives as compassion and loving kindness. To use love as our interaction with reality.

It's not always possible to get your head around that.

What Really Matters

It matters that we love
It matters, the poignancy in our heart
the light of Summer

It matters, our desire to be free
the flavour of freedom, rooted in nothingness
open, ever here

It matters, the ever changing moment,
a fresh evening after many days of heat
a taste of olives

It matters that music exists,
an unknown flute player offering his melody
from a distant flat

It matters not forgetting
we are growing old and one day
we shall disappear

— Yona Chavanne
Summer 2018



Change Bumps

Change bumps It bounces
Change bumps
it bounces

When good things happen—
like openness and understanding—
especially where there had been
injustice and disrespect
it feels so good so right
we claim the healing
of all old injury. We exult righteous
hopeful and fearful
that surely it must continue so.

But then change bumps
against a natural ceiling. It
bounces, heading down. It
relents toward once unrelenting holders of the upper hand
feeding their familiar rain reign stain
of pain.

Before the bump, the next Fall,
the level needs raised.
Amen is not a word of agreement—
Amen is a commitment that
I will help to keep it so. I see what
it is that can be done
and I will work now and forever from this instant
to lift all so that we start the next
reaching for light
higher.

Some people
vision inspire and bring
the revolution.
Some
endure remind and hold
the evolution.

— Kiran Rana



What Really Matters?

when i try to find the answer
to the question
what really matters?
i
get
stressed

i
run around
in circles
looking
for something
i can't find.

maybe this is it!
but what if it isn't?
that over there
seems to matter more
than this
but
everyone says
THIS matters most

i get dizzy
fall down
look up
at the huge
 blue
 sky
 above
 me
grass tickles my skin

i fall again
in love
with this fresh nowness
and
forget the question

— Carol Barrow



All Love

all love
all is love
all are love
all and love
all for love
all with love
all can love
all will love
all too love
all the more love
all love love
all ahhhh love
all be love
al di la
all you need is ...

— Kiran Rana



What matters?

what matters?
 love matters
 the love of breath for itself
 the cleaving of light to darkness

what matters?
 flesh and bone
 muscle
 em – body-ment
 walking dancing resting dreaming

AH!
 the mind matters
 creator planner
 wonder of the world

what matters to the poet is words
 and the unnamable reality
 shimmering beneath/beyond

*I have fallen in love with a rose
 said the Little Prince
 she matters*

what IS the matter?
 a different question
 the drought
 300 teenage girls kidnapped this week in Nigeria
 the woman begging on a street corner in every city
 not enough food
 not enough

what matters to you?
 faith as ultimate concern
 all the theologians sigh

does history matter really?

matter DECAYS
 we grow then go
 back to earth

as a matter of fact
 I don't find any fact
 that matters
 more than our love for each other
 our hands
 reaching over the walls we build
 towards light and the great beyond

a perfect baby girl
 reaches up and up
 finds her toes
 and rolls
 over
 she matters
 perhaps most of all

compassion matters
 and social conscience
 yet ADMIT IT

the dear soft breeze
 ripples the grasses in the meadow
 whether we see it
 or not

— Jeanne Rana
 May 6, 2014

Upcoming Programs 2018-19



Introduction to the Open Path

with Pir Elias
Bristol Theosophical Society
Bristol, England

October 5 – 6, 2018



Doing the Beautiful

A 2-Day Workshop
with Pir Elias and Murshid Kiran Rana

Berkeley: June 15 – 16, 2019



Continuous Realization

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

October 7 – 10, 2018



Wilderness Vision Quest

A Nine-Day Experience
with Murshid Elmer Koole and Chris Covey
Canyonlands, Utah, USA

September 20 – 28, 2019



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



Continuous Realization

A 2-Day Workshop
with Pir Elias and Murshid Kiran Rana
Berkeley, CA

September 21 – 22, 2019



Open Path Training

Six-Month Training in Nondual Realization with Pir Elias
Still Meadow Retreat Center
Damascus, Oregon, USA

Seminar I: **March 14 – 17, 2019**

Seminar II: **September 27 – 30, 2019**



Love and Nonduality

Practices of the Awakened Heart
Advanced Open Path Retreat with Pir Elias
Buckland Hall, Brecon, Wales, UK

October 13 – 18, 2019



The Nondual Heart of Sufism

Three Introductory Sessions
with Pir Elias and Murshid Kiran Rana

Berkeley: **March 22, 2019**

San Francisco: **March 23, 2019**

Santa Cruz: **March 24, 2019**



Living Sufism: Adventures in Being Here

A Nine-Month Webinar
with Eight Sufi Way Guides

October – June, 2019

Last Sunday of each month



Open Path Training

Six-Month Training in Nondual Realization
with Pir Elias

Engineer's House, Bristol, UK

Seminar I: **May 2 – 5, 2019**

Seminar II: **October 9 – 12, 2019**



Love and Nonduality

Practices of the Awakened Heart
Advanced Open Path Retreat with Pir Elias
Himmelreich Retreat Center, Lindau, Germany

May 8 – 14, 2019

