



Fresh Rain

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

FALL 2020

IN THIS ISSUE: Essays by Viv Quillin, Michael Wenger, Kiran Rana, and Erica Witt; Poetry by Pir Elias, Lysana Robinson, Jeanne Rana, Meg Rinaldi, and Sabah Raphael Reed



Dear Friends,

We certainly are “Living in Unpredictable Times.” I find community, the kind words or deeds from or toward friends, a tender hand on a shoulder, helps people the most as we struggle through.

The prose contributions are from Viv Quillin, Michael Wenger, Kiran Rana, Erica Witt, and Pir Elias. Mehera provided the quote from Sufi Inayat. The poets are Lysana Robinson, Jeanne Rana, Meg Rinaldi, and Sabah Raphael Reed. Thank you all for your beautiful contributions!

For Winter, let’s consider the theme **Doing the Beautiful**. We need new theme ideas for next year; please send them to me!

Thanks to all who offer pieces for Fresh Rain. Please consider writing for future issues. We always wonder if we’ll have enough material. I look forward to reading your writing; it inspires me.

With love for each one of you,

Amrita

editor, Fresh Rain: freshrain@sufiway.org



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Living In Unpredictable Times

by Viv Quillin

What If?

Such big events are churning around in the world, I don't think that they need listing again here. My little brain can only come back to the small and personal in an attempt to connect with the vastness of "out there."

My own life is very stable compared with so many others. Living in a small rural community surrounded by mostly unchanging countryside is a sort of peaceful bubble. But I spend a fair amount of time worrying about what might happen. Trying to predict and prepare for what unforeseen misfortune may arrive.

I don't seem to make any preparation for the possibility of a change in circumstances that I like. Many years ago the unforeseen arrival of an inheritance of twenty thousand pounds was very welcome. Adapting to the unpredicted and rapid improvement in the weak and painful muscles which had rendered me pretty disabled has been a delight. Being surprised by unexpected events that I welcome is a matter for wondrous gratitude.

How can I prepare for what I fear might happen? The loss of one of my children or my partner, whose life is so entwined with my own, seem to be unbearable to even contemplate. Having witnessed my seventy-six year old sister's stoicism in the sudden loss of her son and only child, aged fifty, I've been in awe of her tireless practical support to his widow and the three little boys left behind. She keeps busy all the time and says this is how she copes.

Anyway, I try, sitting quietly and imagining receiving terrible news. The result is that I find it impossible to predict my behavior in one of those situations. My experiment with imagining tragedy suggests to me that I am so unpredictable I cannot know how I'd behave. If stuff needed doing for other people, I hope that at least some of the time I'd carry on giving what was necessary. If I only had my own grief to deal with maybe I'd scream and tear my hair, get drunk, stay in bed for weeks.

Sometimes I try to imagine being in the kind of situation that is anticipated if global warming continues. This attempt in my imagination is with the hope that I'll be less frightened if I can predict how I'll cope. In a food shortage would I share my last bowl of rice with another family, even though my own children would get less food because of my choice? I don't know. Many times I've wondered how brave or generous I might be in a war. Retired soldiers have been heard to say that the experience of war was the best time of their lives and they'd never felt so alive since. It's beginning to seem that trying to prepare a response is pointless, each of us will live in hard times in our own way, plodding along and hopefully singing when we can, even if it is only under our breath.

Receiving the first shock of unpredicted hurt can have a particular force that it may be impossible to defend ourselves from. When I sat trying to imagine this, these words softly came to me, "Life break me open, Love please heal me."



Living Life

by Michael Wenger

The absolutely most dangerous moment of my whole life happened in my study. I was getting up from my desk and tripped over my feet, fell and hit my head on the wall about 30cm (10 inch) from the floor. One of my vertebrae of the neck was a little broken—just a little—2 millimeters from a paraplegic future. Very unpredictable!

The Times are unpredictable. Anything can happen anytime. Everything remains the old, completely unpredictable chaos.

But the times, in what way are they unpredictable? When we fantasize what could possibly happen next, we drown in a lake of unpredictability. There are happy times, hard times, blissful ones and times we sit in lockdown or death and illness, but the times are always unpredictable. So the real question, how to live in unpredictable times, is

actually the question how to live life. And this is indeed a very interesting question: how to live life in these challenging times, difficult times, or times with new, unknown challenges. Times we are pushed at the wall, full of fear or without joy.

What is the solution? How to live life in challenging times?

I do not know!

No remedy!

I do not know.

...or is this the “right” attitude? Just not knowing how to better the situation and surrender to this? Just experiencing fear and that’s okay. Just being confused and without orientation? Just looking into the future and having no vision that makes sense and relax in that? Just do not know and be at peace. Is this the choice we have?



Flash

by Pir Elias

Here in this grief garden we mourn
what is about to happen.

There are bulldozers at the wall, revving up.

We check the time. We check it again.

Children arrive, many of them,

they climb on the wall, they help each other up,

they ring the place holding hands.

This is the moment we are living.

Some days there are Absurdist plays...

Cancer Journal Entry by Kiran Rana
August 30, 2020

KIRAN Some days are flat... F __ L __ A __ T __
 phuh-latt. ... do-re-mi-fa-latt! ... flatflatflat.
 as a doornail.

Junayad, a dear friend who has a long acquaintance with cancer, and I (Kiran) check-in on Zoom on day 9 of my cycle 2

KIRI Some days are flat, dude

JUJU You bet they are!

KIRI No, I mean like, endless flat

JUJU You're right! You're where you are! Going nowhere!

KIRI Nothing moves, dude. Far as the eye can see. Far as the feel can feel.

JUJU Yep ... It's all right there and there's nothing more

KIRI And it's not happening — or going to happen!

JUJU That's it! That's so chill! You know what it's going to be: it's going to be flat.

KIRI So you don't wait to feel better, right?

JUJU No, man, there isn't going to be a "better." It's a flat day. F __ L __ A __ T. That's the day it is. And there isn't going to be a "worse," get it?

KIRI OK! So what you're saying is, Flat don't go down further, flat is flat?

JUJU Ka-ching, man! You got it! Flat it is!

KIRI No — wait! YOU got it: Flat is the new up!

JUJU Ring-a-ding-ding! You got it! Flat is the new up!

JUJU and KIRI fist bump on Zoom, grinning like monkeys, and dance around, chanting together: "Flat is the new up! Flat is the new up! Flat is the new up!"

Over both their Zoom backgrounds there drifts a ghostly image of two characters on a bare stage. They are waiting for something, and they might've been waiting a long time. Maybe it's an old Mike Nichols production of an Absurdist play, maybe with Steve Martin as Vladimir and Robin Williams as Estragon. One of them, let's say it's Vladimir, speaks

DIDI I can't go on.

A little distance from him, Estragon sits, looking into the lights.

GOGO

DIDI I can't go on. ... I'll go on.

GOGO

They both sit. Gradually the lighting, which is very flat — there are no highlights, shadows, accents — fades. It never goes out.

The closing images and dialog are taken from the famous Samuel Beckett play, Waiting for Godot. Here is a link to the Wikipedia page for more information: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waiting_for_Godot

In a poll conducted by the British Royal National Theatre in 1998/99, it was voted the "most significant English language play of the 20th century."



Living in Unpredictable Times. The Opposites

by Erica Witt

I've been thinking and praying and pondering a great deal recently about the power of opposites, both for good and ill (see what I mean!).

In the times we live in now I expect we all feel the contradictions and paradoxes and confusion in and around us much of the time. And it seems to be getting stronger, harder, more exhilarating, more depressing, a roller coaster much of the time. Unpredictable. Unstoppable, it seems.

Love...hate. Good...bad. Male...female. Black...white. Strong...weak.. Have...have not. Politics, economics, climate, the body, the planet. Aging.

Birth.... Death.... and all the moments of Life in between.

I sit with my two sets of ninety-nine beads, the beautiful dark wooden ones Elias gave me, that he told me came from Aleppo. And the turquoise plastic ones I was given so generously by a laughing and giggling woman at Friday prayers in Sivas in Anatolia. One male, one female in origin. I let the beads tell me stories. Sometimes I sit, with the weight of them in either hand, feeling for a point of balance. Sometimes I put them under my pillow. Sometimes I forget all about them for a while.

It's a comfort and a way to play, unwind, late at night before I go to bed.

It's also been a secret that I now share. I hope it helps in these extraordinary times.

I hope you find a way to play sometimes, to soothe, to open up new possibilities, to loosen the knots of entanglement and incomprehension, to find a place of peace and security deep inside and between and around the opposites.

Ninety-nine names of Allah. Ninety-nine beads. I am deeply respectful. And I expand the practice to explore the give and take of Love. Singing, chanting, spoken, silent, just letting the beads fall through my fingers, or guiding them along the thread, pausing at each thirty-three node to widen my awareness, waken myself up if I am nodding off.

Memories, dreams, reflections. Ninety-nine men dancing in a circle, ninety-nine women dancing together back the other way. Ninety-nine names and stories. Ninety-nine glimpses. Ninety-nine pauses to reflect.

It's the pause between the beads that holds the clue.



"Man meets with hardships in life; sometimes they seem too hard for him to stand. But often such experiences become like higher initiations in life of the traveler on the path." — Sufi Inayat Khan

Tagore says: "When the string of the violin was being tuned it felt the pain of being stretched, but once it was tuned then it knew why it was stretched." So it is with the human soul. While the soul goes through pain, torture and trouble it thinks that it would have been much better if it had gone through life without it. But once it reaches the culmination of it then, when it looks back, it begins to realize why all this was meant: it was only meant to tune the soul to a certain pitch.

A View from a Scottish Island

Six months in and counting,
no end to the pandemic in sight.
Staring through my window,
the outer view ever changing.
The inner view repeating,
going round and round
churning over this weird happening.
Newscasters pose endless questions
and go over the same old ground.
No answers, no certainty. No matter,
just keep on speculating,
fill the programme, don't stop.

Four years of Brexit, remember that?
For sure it's still "Let's get it done."
This year is a Covid-19 interlude,
but definitely not light relief.
A miniscule enemy lurking unseen,
ready to pounce at any moment.
So now it's Brexit Revisited,
heralding chaos for decades to come.
Cries for Scottish Independence
grow louder this time around.

Truth becomes slippery and evasive
as we're persuaded to worry and doubt.
Collectively we stumble along
this ne'er-before-trod road.
But hey, wait, this is normal.
The road is always new
and thus far untrodden.
As we create our pristine footprints
Let's have Trust hold our hand
and be our companion.
Let's make space for Grace
to walk with us and disperse
our fruitless clinging to certainty.
This life is, after all,
A glorious, bountiful mystery.
Let's willingly embrace it.

— Lysana Robinson



don't identify

with suffering
don't identify with any of it

don't identify with joy
hard, when after a blustery storm
sun turns the snowy lawn
into a field of diamonds

don't cling
but if I don't hang on
won't I fall?

resting in emptiness
sounds restful
falling in emptiness
is its own type of suffering

the drop of water
becomes the ocean
not exactly reassuring
but close

if I can just
tie up my ego and hide it
a closeted ego

but wait !
what "I"
just tied up my ego?
so confusing

don't even identify
with this

does that help?

— Jeanne Rana



Uncertainty

Beauty lies in its own vanishing
Uncertainty...
Reminds us that we too will disappear
Will we catch a glimpse of the ephemeral beauty on offer?
That is the only question.

— Meg Rinaldi



Gaia, calling

There is nothing now to do
but fall in trembling
supplication to your call—
worm cast filling mouth,
eyes shuttered with the snails.

Rain fills me new with breath,
trees rising like black staves
and air around electric in the storm.

I know your ancient paths
are claimed but seldom
walked.

So here I am.

Primitive,
lost,
unraveled to your love.

Lead me.
I am yours.

— Sabah Raphael Reed



Pain Terminator

I would like
a Marvel Superhero
called Pain Terminator

PT would mend
all the broken souls
the wounded hearts.
She (of course a she)
would apply
comfort compresses,
spoon out natural remedies
that even tasted good.

She would lie down
with the lonely
in the dark night
sing a lovely song at dawn.

She would be close to godly
but far more dependable.

Her blue cloak
would be filled with stars
and in her pack she'd carry
band aids for everything.

Miss Pain Terminator
would focus on people
but she could be called upon
to help poodles and kitties
horses, even armadillos.
She would restore habitat
for Monarch butterflies
solve all problems for the bees
and — believe it or not —
swallow the huge garbage patch
in the Pacific.
She would reverse
global warming.

We would all benefit
from Miss PT
and by example
she would show us
how to earn our very own
Pain Terminator badges
and eventually
wear our own blue cape
filled with stars.

— Jeanne Rana



Upcoming Programs 2020



Being Mortal

Our Journey through Aging and Dying

An Online Webinar/Retreat with

Pir Elias Amidon

OCTOBER, 2020

This webinar/retreat will be offered over five weekends in October, 2020. The program's focus will be on the inevitable pilgrimage we all will make (if we live long enough) into aging and dying, and on being with the aging and dying of our loved ones. As we explore the many territories along that pilgrimage — the arc of our lives, the loss of capacities, being with fear and pain, giving and receiving care, grieving, releasing attachments, coming to peace, and many others — we will dive deep into the sacred experience that the journey of aging and dying offers us.

The webinar will be held online for two hours each Saturday and Sunday on the first two weekends and the last two weekends of October. The middle weekend will be devoted to individual practice and contemplation, with no online sessions. Between the weekend sessions there will be a one-hour online session with a small group, focusing on issues that have arisen during the weekend sessions.

For complete information and to register, please visit www.sufiway.org.

