



Fresh Rain

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IN THIS ISSUE: Essays by Sabah Raphael Reed, Judy Ryde, Pir Elias and Sharif Hawkins; Poetry by Jeanne Rana and Sharif Hawkins; and "Meeting Each Other" with Jürgen Beyer



Dear Friends,

Habits—they sustain us or drain us. In either case, it's wise to notice them, and be aware of their power in our lives.

For me, they mostly sustain. I write every night from 10–11:30. I exercise on the elliptical to get my heart going most evenings around 7 p.m. If the rhythm gets interrupted by travel or illness, no concern or worry—I simply get back on track when possible. Boudevijn and I have a habit of eating simple, healthy, fresh food. We walk our dog two to three times a day. All of the above, habits that support our lives. Now in my seventies, I find most draining habits have fallen away—including worry! Al-hum du-lillah!

The contributions come from Sabah Reed, Judy Ryde, Pir Elias, Sharif Hawkins, Jeanne Rana, and Jürgen Beyer. Thanks to all who write for us! Please consider doing so for future issues. We always wonder if we'll have enough material. The theme for the Fall equinox issue is **Acts of Kindness**. For Winter, let's consider **Paying Attention**.

I look forward to reading your writing. It inspires me.

With love for each one of you,
Amrita

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All That We Are

by Sabah Raphael Reed

We learn to be human in part by imitating and interacting with those around us. Certain behaviors are reinforced or regulated by the contexts in which we find ourselves and we develop patterns of thought and grooves of action which, over time, like crustaceans on the rock, can solidify as habits. Such habits remind us who we are and secure us in the order of things. They also work beneath the surface as currents that carry us unconsciously without our even knowing where or why. Some studies suggest that almost half our daily actions are unconscious and habitual.

We also suffer from a belief that the rational mind can exert agency over the manifest world simply through willpower. This creates a sense of inadequacy when once again we “fail” to change our “bad habits”: to lose weight; to be less judgmental or angry; to end procrastination and so forth. Such a dynamic may even arise when we consciously applaud our “good habits”: an exercise routine, our meditation practice, the harmony of our intimate relations. No sooner do we hunker down in self-satisfaction when something pops up and we lose our equilibrium.

Psychotherapy reminds us that our behaviors and beliefs, including our habits, are affected by profound and sometimes traumatic experiences with deeply held patterns reflecting unconscious desires, fears and needs. Those working in the field of addiction therapy, where highly destructive habits are especially resistant to change, point to the corrosive effect of entrenched self-loathing and loss of hope. Then, moving between moderating habits and being in their thrall is replaced with long term debilitating inertia.

And *all of this* is part of what it means to be human. But is it all that we are? Is there a way to relax the restrictions of routine practices, the limitations of behavioral norms, the see-saw motion of “good habit” versus “bad habit” in our lives?

The journey of human development offers us a clue. Evidently we are by no means only a cluster of behavioral traits. A baby learning language makes imitative moves but then the wonderful creative capacity of the human mind shines forth—spontaneous new utterances never before heard are suddenly present. We are not just captives to prior experience. Pir Elias reminds us of the power of spontaneity as we remember “each moment new”—an opening into the stream of pure awareness that is our realized nature.

Indeed, the teachings of the Open Path as a whole offer us practices that help us relax the limiting, habitual, dualistic mind. Meditation, prayer and even application of will all have their place, although in time they also call to be let go. Release at inception, the one rule and surrender to the ocean of kindness are all gracious offerings that aid us “always coming home.”

Collaborative, creative contemplative enquiry is another powerful medium for transformation. To give an example: The escalating climate emergency necessitates urgent economic and political global action. It also calls for significant change in our habits. Yet many of us find it hard to change these habits. Why? In part perhaps because of our attachment to short term comforts, in part the difficulties of accessing the means (*continued*)



All That We Are (continued)

to resource change, but alongside these also the emotional, psychic and spiritual despair that arises when we recognize the scale of the crisis. It sometimes feels easier to turn away.

Embracing the “Work that Reconnects” offered by Joanna Macy, and using her book *Active Hope*, a group of friends and I have begun to explore how to turn toward this without being overwhelmed or reacting with defensiveness, anger and fear. She encourages a process of expressing gratitude, honoring our pain for the world, seeing with fresh eyes, and finally, going forth in whatever way calls. All of this held within an alchemical circle.

Changing habits is never an easy or individual process but nor is it just behavioral. It requires that we animate all that we are—our wild, creative, connected souls—in service of collective awakening.

I’ll end here with a reflection on the other meaning of habit. As a teenager I briefly thought of becoming a nun, but had a feeling the nun’s habit itself could be a kind of restrictive uni-form. It was only much later in life that I discovered the wonderful poetry of Lal Ded (Lalla, Laleshwari)—a 14th century Kashmiri mystic—and heard her inspiring call for us to cast all habits aside and dance naked in the soul.

The soul, like the moon

(Lalla)

The soul, like the moon,
is now, and always new again.

And I have seen the ocean
continuously creating.

Since I scoured my mind
and my body, I too, Lalla,
am new, each moment new.

My teacher told me one thing,
live in the soul.

When that was so,
I began to go naked,
and dance.



Habits

by Judy Ryde

I regard myself as a creature of habit. I find habits comforting. They are holding and reassuring and are internal prompts to do something which bypasses having to think, particularly about tasks that are small but important. For instance, I always feed the chickens first thing in the morning, so I know I won't forget them. If I just did it at some point during the day, I am quite likely to forget altogether. In the summer months I open the green house before feeding them so it doesn't get overheated. As I don't do this in the winter it takes me a little while to get back into the habit and remember each day when the summer arrives. My day is full of these little habits. Even things like cleaning my teeth is a habit which I might well forget if it wasn't part of my bedtime ritual.

However comforting and apparently benign these habits are, I wonder if they get in the way of being more mindful and present. I remember the way that Murshid Fazal used to challenge us by shaking us out of our comfortable patterns like running a program in which each day was twenty-five rather than twenty-four hours, thus putting us out of synch with the sun, or having nothing to eat except chocolate. He gave many chillas which were specially designed for individuals to shake them out of their particular patterns. These patterns could get in the way of being truly alive. Such measures discombobulate us, so we don't quite know where we are or where we are going. But wake us up.

Many spiritual paths do the opposite of this. A monastic day, for example, has a daily program of prayer, meditation, work, silence and mealtimes. From time to time I have experienced the peace that comes with this way of living. A predictable holding pattern such as this can relieve us of worldly worries, so that the more serious business of drawing nearer to God or to enlightenment can be focused upon. Although a day of habitual and anticipated events can be helpful to a spiritual life, it is not always the Sufi way. This poem by Rumi exemplifies this encouragement to wake up to life rather than be made drowsy by habits:

wake up, wake up,
this night is gone,
wake up.

abandon, abandon
even your dear self
abandon

there is an idiot
in our market place
selling a precious soul

if you doubt my word
get up this moment
and head to the market now

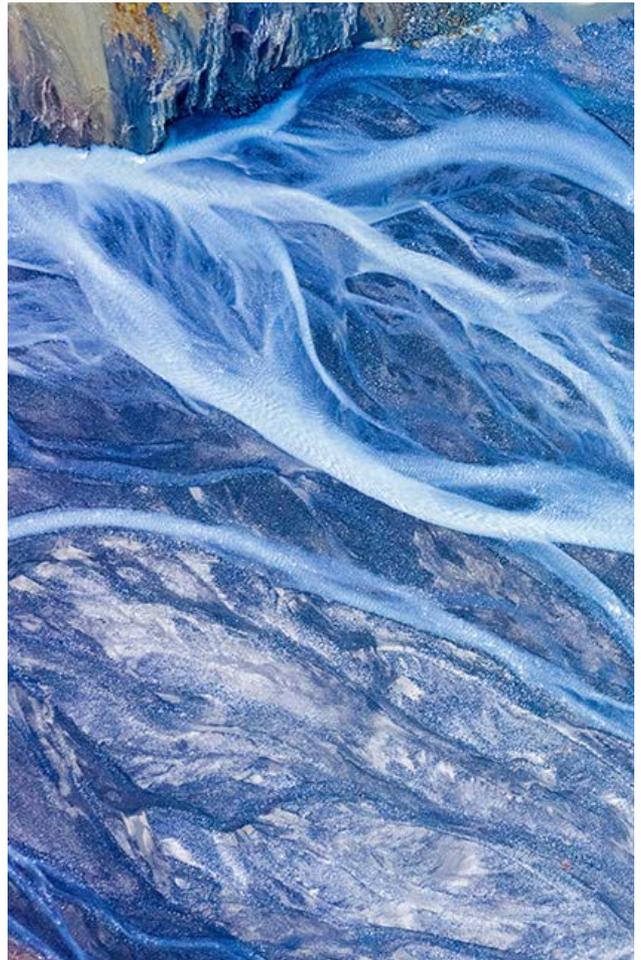
don't listen to trickery
don't listen to the witches
don't wash blood with blood.

first turn yourself upside down
empty yourself like a cup of wine
then fill to the brim with the essence

a voice is descending
from the heavens
a healer is coming

if you desire meaning
let yourself fall ill
let yourself fall ill

Ghazal 2133



Habit Rap

by Pir Elias

A planet has a habit of spinning,
a mountain has a habit of standing still,
winners have a habit of winning,
others make a habit of seeking thrills.

Rabbits have a habit of hopping,
addicts have a habit of sniffing cocaine,
shoppers have a habit of shopping,
none of this is simple to explain.

Lovers have a habit of loving,
for heaven's sake it's good they do,
don't think of your habits as something troubling,
habits are whatever gets you through.

Good habits, bad habits, nice ones and nasty,
some are gonna give you an angioplasty,
but others will make you wise and stable,
so care for your habits, if you're able.



Proverbs on Habits

by Sharif Hawkins

1. Once is a choice, twice a repetition, thrice a habit.
2. A habit is a good servant, but a poor master.
3. Good habits are a restful home, bad habits are a prison.
4. With a simple habit you do not have to worry about fashion.
5. But an unwashed habit becomes very smelly.
6. Addictive habits breed like rabbits.
7. A well worn habit keeps us asleep—a new habit can wake us up.
8. Sometimes it takes a new habit to break a habit.
9. Spiritual practices are new habits that break old habits.
10. Your habitation also inhabits you.
11. Habits are a form of delegation to the autonomic nervous system.
12. Try trading your habits, then you will discover what value they have.
13. Habits are infectious, so choose who you spend time with.
14. Habits are proverbial, they act by themselves.



my writing habit

I write
because the
words bleed from my pen

I write
to calm my
agitated child

I write
for beauty
love and harmony

I write
in spite of
mediocrity

I write
to spite all
my hypocrisy

I write
to sing of
egrets gulls and crows

I write
to save this
beauty that I find

I write
of course for
my own peace of mind

I write
this morning
also tomorrow

I write
to waylay
despair and sorrow

because
I will not
dance and paint, I write

I hope
to write one
very special poem

will you
let me know
when this has happened?

—Jeanne Rana
Dekaaz



Fana or The Dressing Room Door

To Michaela

The applause is fading into a memoried echo
Theatre lights are being extinguished one by one
And in the fading twilight of the dressing room
The actor slowly disclothes his role.
The greasepaint scraped, the costume removed
And hung on the hook, behind the door.
And for a timeless moment
The once actor stands there all alone
Naked, empty, between the worlds.
“Was he Hamlet? Did Hamlet exist there on the stage?
Where has Hamlet gone?”

Naked he goes to take from the hanger his other garb
The one familiar in his daily world.
Then for a moment, pauses, wondering about this other role,
This self he has learnt to play.
What happens, he wonders, if he leaves this role
Hanging on its hook?
And in this moment of freedom
Neither being Hamlet, nor playing self
Slips free through the crack in time
Out through the fire exit, previously unnoticed
Into another world and the free night air.

But who was it that left that night?
And who was left, hanging on the door?

—Sharif Hawkins



Meeting Each Other

Jürgen Beyer

Looking backwards to the development of my life one could assume there was a plan underlying it. And yes, I had many plans—better called “ideas”—about what life could bring to me or how I could contribute to it. Some came true, others not. Was it me who decided or was it just an illusion? Today the answer is crystal clear: Life just happened.

But what happened? A short journey through this life:

A home with politically active parents that gave me a lot of confidence and freedom. Friends of my parents who inspired and encouraged me, an elderly brother who challenged me and a grandmother who surrounded me with care—these were the first defining years of my life.

From this fine fabric of interaction, I grew up with the ambition to show who I am.

Thirteen years as an officer in the German Air Force (including the study of psychology and pedagogy) gave me the opportunity to practice, lead, and serve as an example—which clearly shaped me. I felt my influence, and could see the results of “my” decisions experienced as well as I crossed boundaries. Higher, faster, and further became my motto.

A self-chosen break of six months after the end of my conscription provided a wonderful opportunity to prepare for Argentina, my next station, to leave the solid framework of not only cultural habits, but to reinvent one’s own life. In Argentina, the sum of my self-evidences was then properly challenged and re-sorted as a new, smaller and less tightly knit package. Intercultural competences could be examined, further humility had to be learned. But that just happened. It wasn’t *my* plan.

I was able to take advantage of all of this in the following years as a HR manager in international companies and later on partner in a large consulting firm. As in all the time before, I constantly continued learning and “developing” myself, and did so with pleasure.



In the midst of the nineties I abruptly came to a full stop. Faster and higher had brought me close to burn out. I didn’t have that in my plans ... and found out that sometimes no plan is the best plan. I left my job behind, became self-employed, and opened up for a shamanic journey inspired by a vision quest led by Dieter Kurt Schmidt. Ten years later, he also invited me to a workshop with Pir Elias, which became another turning point in my life. My heart—from the first moment—knew this community around Elias was something like a “home base.” Since then, our meetings in all their forms are a central point of my life in Germany and Spain.

And also this was never in a plan I could have made. It was a gift life offered to me!

I am still in business as an executive coach and consultant and enjoy that this work allows or better requires me to be in the now. Together with my wife Paloma, who is a psychotherapist, I also do constellation work for individuals, families or organizations, with stunning results based on what life is showing us during the work.

Last remark: The older I get, the less I know who I am. And the less relevant it gets for me. Be in the moment and listen what life is telling me—that is my “recipe” for now.

Upcoming Programs 2019



THE OPEN PATH: Recognizing Nondual Awareness
Six-Month Training in Nondual Realization with Pir Elias
Still Meadow Retreat Center
Damascus, Oregon, USA
Seminar II: October 4 – 7, 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



Sufism and the Art of Loving
A Series of Ten Saturday Evening Gatherings
with Kiran Rana and Jeanne Rana
Berkeley, California
March 30 – December 8, 2019



The Nondual Heart of Sufism
An experiential weekend workshop
with Pir Elias
Soefi-Huis, Haarlem, Netherlands
October 19 – 20, 2019



Wilderness Vision Quest
A Nine-Day Experience
with Murshid Elmer Koole and Chris Covey
Canyonlands, Utah, USA
September 20 – 28, 2019

