



Fresh Rain

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

FALL 2017

IN THIS ISSUE: Essays by Suzanne Inayat-Khan, Carol Barrow, Gabriel Leslie Mezei, and Sabah Raphael Reed; Poetry by Jeanne Rana, Elias Amidon, and Binah Taylor



Dear Friends,

Our theme for this Fall issue is "Seeing Through Division." I expressed the need for help in gathering material for *Fresh Rain* issues, and twelve people stepped up! Deep thanks to Carol Barrow who fielded the contributions and funneled them to me.

In the article section, Suzanne Inayat-Khan notices how often the mind divides. Sabah Raphael Reed speaks to her retreat experience. Carol Barrow put pictures of two spiritual teachers and our President on her altar, and sends compassion and blessing every day. Gabriel Leslie Mezei speaks about his sense of unity as it grew through the Universal Worship Service.

The poetry section includes a poem by Jeanne Rana entitled "preference," three short poems by Elias titled "Seeing Through," and a prose poem by Binah Talor called "Difference Not Division."

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

At Winter solstice, the theme is **Solitude**: how do we protect it in this always-connected world? What do you love, or find uncomfortable about aloneness and silence?

I encourage you to write—**you** are the very heart of *Fresh Rain*. Please share with us. I hope your autumn is filled with gentleness and generosity.

with love for each one of you,
Amrita
editor, *Fresh Rain*: freshrain@sufiway.org



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Do Divisions Ever Stop?

by Suzanne Inayat-Khan

What is my hook into this theme? On an inner level I mean, not in the head. (There's a division, right there—does it ever stop?)

I answer to myself that I might soften my edges. That's not seeing through division, it's more ... that any separation drops away. When that happens, I feel a deeper, more intimate participation in life. I feel real, easy, true, flowing. I experience a somatic warmth, and a lightness. It is certainly my preferred state of being. And I notice when it's there. I do. I feel a natural happiness. It's like, something inside is smiling! Sometimes it even smiles through my face!

Then something, anything, happens and before I know it, I begin making an edge. I like, I don't like. It's right, it's wrong. It's non-dual. It's duality. It's over there, thank heavens, it doesn't belong here. There's nothing I can do. No, I can do something. If I change it might stop. Hmm, if only they understood (what I know/do/mean). Can I explain it better and in a kind way? And I'm noticing myself doing this. Trying, naming, sorting. Edge after edge. Brick by brick I build the wall of that thing, this thing. And gradually, I tell myself, I'm separate again. I think I'm on the outside of being in Being.

So, what to do? First, I stop minding. Minding seems to involve a fixed thought process. A certainty of a problem

and/or a solution. What I mind about becomes bigger. More noticeable. Stopping minding, it's less noticeable. (But I am *mindful* of my art of separating and delineating and dividing—and have no doubt, it is a well-practiced art of mine!) So many of my own problems, issues, challenges are solved simply by not minding. I do still care. But caring is inclusive and open. Caring naturally includes other. Caring has open heart.

Sometimes this is enough. But there are practical, human things I can do, too. I practice listening instead of seeing. I practice loosening the focus and emphasizing my peripheral vision. Both of these, although apparently physical, alter my experiential state. Soften my edges. Sometimes I sing, hum, draw, paint, dance—anything that reminds me of the spontaneous arising of life, moment by moment. And it works. Edges fall away.

See, division, it's not real. None of it. Divisions and edges are head-made. Needing or wanting to see through them is equally self-created. Do I need to "see through" division? It gives me the thought that division is really there, albeit in potential transparency. But the whole idea is made up! That I can divide something means that it started off whole!

"No-one can stand outside the Only Being."

—Sufi Inayat Khan



Teachers Along the Way

By Carol Barrow

Recently, I had the privilege of staying two weeks in a Buddhist retreat cabin. There, in one corner of my bedroom, sat an altar on which were placed three framed photos, each of a different Buddhist teacher.

I was attracted to the picture of one monk in particular, a man whose short-cropped gray hair and abundant laugh lines made him appear to be in his eighties. He wore the maroon robe of his lineage. His face was alive with a most beautiful and contagious smile. When I showed a photo of this monk to a friend, she accurately exclaimed, "His whole face has been hijacked by his smile!" I spent many hours of my retreat sitting in front of this smiling monk. His image evoked in me a sense of open-heartedness, an innocent and full welcoming of life.

After I arrived home from my retreat, wanting to continue my relationship with the monk, I created an altar for myself, and on it I placed a copy of the smiling man's photo, along with a candle, some beautiful stones, and a portrait of another spiritual teacher. Then I did a search on the internet for an image of the current president of the United States and I chose a fairly nice one to print. I placed it on the altar, too, to the left of the monk and the other spiritual teacher.

Inayat Khan said that "...the one who does not love his fellow man cannot love God." I have not felt a lot of love for our current president. It appears that he and I see the world very differently. He is a challenging type of teacher for me, and I want to see beyond his actions, to the human who has his own reasons for what he does.



Now each evening, I spend time with the images of the three teachers on my altar. First, I look at the president, and I acknowledge the similarities that we share. We each have a body, heart, and mind. We each worry and get frightened; we are both trying our best to navigate life. After I have acknowledged our similarities, I send the president well-wishes. May he have strength and support. May he be free from suffering and its causes. May he be peaceful and happy and loved. Then I turn to the monk, the image that brings me into a space of open joy. I acknowledge our shared human qualities, and I send him the same good wishes I sent the president. I repeat this with the third teacher, a man who's changed my life in ways too many to list.

Over the last few months of this practice I have noticed that when speaking to the smiling monk and the other spiritual teacher, I have felt a warmth. I have had a certain recognition that they already embody the very qualities that I wish for them. At the same time, when sending good wishes to the president, I have been attaching to them some preferences. I wanted the president to be free from suffering so that he wouldn't spread more suffering to others. I wanted a result. Without naming this wrong or right, I just noticed what came up for me.

Last night I looked at the photo of the president, and for the first time, I saw him as a person who worries and can get frightened just like the rest of us. Like us, he is trying his best to navigate life. I wished him strength, to be free from suffering, to be loved and supported. No strings attached. In that moment, I felt a sense of lightness, love, and compassion. Without naming this wrong or right, I just noticed what came up for me.

*"I searched but I could not find Thee;
I called Thee aloud, standing on the minaret;
I rang the temple bell with the rising and setting of the sun;
I bathed in the Ganges in vain;
I came back from the Kaaba disappointed;
I looked for Thee on the earth;
I searched for Thee in the heaven, my Beloved,
but at last I have found Thee
hidden as a pearl in the shell of my heart."*

(Sufi Inayat Khan, from the *Gayan*)

Unity in Diversity

by Gabriel Leslie Mezei

From my journals:

First, I discovered Sufi dancing, then the Dances of Universal Peace. To the accompaniment of the sacred chants from all the religions, we went round in a large circle, did some simple steps, sometimes turned in place for one, or two or three rounds. In the other parts of my life, I always sought out novelty, variety, excitement. But here I could slow down, immerse myself in the chanting, the movement and the group—with hands joined, united with each other, with the music, the words, the reality behind the words; with Adonai, Allah, Buddha, Krishna, Wakan Tanka, the one being that we are all part of.

My first Universal Worship Service was in Hafiz's living room. On a coffee table were laid out the holy books of all the great religions, peacefully side by side. A candle was lit for each, and one representing "all those who, whether known or unknown to the world, have held aloft the light of truth amidst the darkness of human ignorance." There were readings from each book, and many chants sung.

I was blown away by the idea that one could worship all the gods of mankind, that one could accept all the teachings, one could be for all religions, without being against any. That I could do that! That I could aspire to the example of Jesus, without being disloyal to my Jewish origins. That I could practice Buddhist meditation. That I

could get lost in the Sufi chant of remembrance, Zhikr: "La illaha, ill Allah." There is no God, but God. There is nothing but God. There is only Oneness. We are all part of it—no, we are it, and it is us. Words failed, but the feeling was there, the search ended. This is my way.

It took another year or two of learning about the universal nature of this particular path before I was ready to try it more formally, and be initiated into the Sufi Order. After ten years, as I complained to one of my friends that we did not have a regular Universal Worship in Toronto any more, she said to me: "That's easy to fix. You have to become a Cherag." I was in a state of shock! "Who, me? I am not ready for that." But I did not sleep a wink that night, as the rightness of the suggestion worked on me. As I studied for that role, I increasingly saw and felt the "unity of religious ideals," as Pir-O-Murshid Hazrat Inayat Khan taught. As I conducted each service over the last twenty years, I could feel the great spirits that came to us, as rays of the one Spirit, and I could feel myself imbued with the "Spirit of Guidance."

Over the last few years, I see the unity of all being even more strongly through the Sufi Way, the Open Path. It is helping me with an open awareness of the unified ground of our being, the unity in diversity at a deep level.



Hidden Wholeness

by Sabah Raphael Reed

In 2016, over three consecutive full moons, I was fortunate to undertake a series of “dark retreats” spending thirty-six hours in complete darkness. These concluded in Nada, Colorado, under a blue moon—the thirteenth full moon in the lunar calendar that only occurs every seven years. The experience was deeply affecting.

Amongst other things, it revealed how hard it is to stop the light shining through; that the pineal gland behind the third eye chakra itself has photoreceptive cells that permit us to see in the dark; that darkness, the earth, the body themselves emit light, rather than only receive it.

As each retreat unfolded, there were many recurring moments of noticing the mind’s story-telling, its projections and attachments together with the body’s sensations, expectations and limitations. Equally these were pierced through with non-moments of disappearing, point of view dissolving, ecstasy of “I and I” entwined, a profound sense of the Oneness of Being flowing through everything and the spaces in-between: no I, no this, no that, no-thing at all.

And one of the most profound moments was not in the dark itself. It was the moment of coming into the light, walking out into the world in the pre-dawn light, the vista washed in shades of black, silver, and grey under the numinous moon, with no sense of distance or depth of field; everything existing in one unified dimension. And then, an extraordinary instance as the twilight turned towards dawn—a nanosecond—when the landscape and all creation shifted into three dimensions and suddenly separation was there! This tree was distinct from that tree; that hillside was further away than the other; I was here and they were there. And yet, and yet...

Almost from the inside out, I could feel the beauty of all creation thrumming in the air; the magnificence of diversity, of uniqueness, of otherness and sameness co-existing in the same breath. Like gazing into the eyes of one’s beloved and seeing both oneself looking back but also their extraordinary and precious them-ness. And I felt my I-ness as blessing—to be embodied here, now, this form, this being, seeing the one world with two eyes.



The Tao Te Ching comes to mind here:

*The Way bears one.
The one bears two.
The two bear three.
The three bear the ten thousand things.
The ten thousand things
carry the yin on their shoulders
and hold in their arms the yang,
whose interplay of energy
makes harmony.*

—Lao Tzu (translated by Ursula le Guin)

Such interplay between pre-one-ness and everything-ness, or between formlessness and form, is at the heart of creation, and the relationship between these mysteries—the fascia of interconnection—points to the healing move called for throughout the spheres: yin in balance with yang; feminine with masculine; dark with light; human with more-than-human and so forth.

In Taoism, this call to harmony, balance and integration is represented by the symbol:



Consider how this symbol reflects yet enriches the mathematical symbol for division.



Seeing through division invites awareness of the beautiful creativity inherent in division—the sperm and egg coming together and exploding into a stream of becomingness—whilst at the same time calling us to recognize the inherent wholeness in creation.

Without remembering to hold both, lightly, we can easily become stuck in either polarity, enamored with embodied experiences or dispersed into enraptured bliss. Equally we see around us the wounds of entrenched separation or severance, where relational unity has been forgotten, or may even have been replaced with hatred of the other and a fearful compulsion to police all boundaries.

So, let us honor all differences whilst being mindful of the risks of severance.

And in doing so, may we constantly re-source opening to the exquisite point where “self and other,” “this and that,” “here and now,” “never and always,” intersect with dynamic vitality and burst us, brilliantly, into flame.

preference

I want
the best one
because I deserve

I want
the one I
had before. So there!

I want
all the light
none of the darkness

I want
to blame you
if I can't have it

I want
to keep on
saying I I I

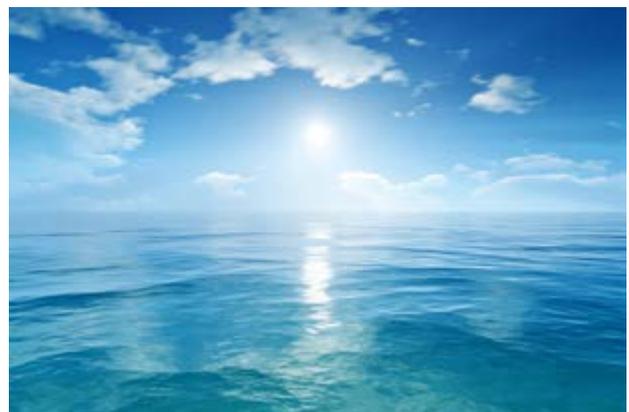
I want
to be the
first and the best one

I want
to not say
I want all the time

I want
to dissolve
raindrop in the sea

tear drop in the ocean

—Jeanne Rana
April 14, 2017



Seeing Through

Three Little Poems

Behind my face they say is blood and bone
but I know differently. In here Orion
is throwing a ball for the Dog Star to catch;
in here somewhere it's raining on a vast ocean;
in here I'm a young man hoping to kiss you.
I'm not making this up. Come see for yourself.



Dawn, and the battleground is quiet,
corpses strewn about, staring at the sky.
We walk amongst them, forgiving everyone.
A little bird hops on some soldier's boot
and sings in a curious language.



This body has its appetites,
a horse grazing on fresh grass,
but we come from a place inside taste
where nothing is needed,
where meadow and horse are made of light.
Forget the saddle and bridle,
there's no need to control anything
now that we know what we are.

—Elias Amidon



Difference Not Division

Binah Taylor

Difference not division:
 In diversity's embrace
 Possibility of
 Deeper connection.
 On city streets, in the markets
 I listen to tonal sounds not understood
 Follow gestures
 Like a watchful child

At the university
 A woman pulls down a banner of independence
 Students on fire
 Taking sides on
 'One country, two systems' principle
 Hong Kong no stranger to this tension
 Its chequered past holds many tales
 Of resilience
 Resurgence in adversity
 The fabric the buildings wear,
 Old and new
 Stitched together
 Mismatched
 Stronger for it

In Wan Chai
 I eat at a café alongside strangers
 On metal stools under red lanterns
 Our bowls from the same pot
 Five Spice has bound us to each other
 Our smiles connect
 Gender, language, nationality, age all fall away
 In this simple pleasure
 This precious moment
 No division

Today I read of
 China's 'Belt and Road' initiative
 Return of the Silk Road
 A great ambition—
 Sixty nations linked by trade
 Collaboration not domination
 One can hope

I turn the page
 A former White House aide has landed in Wan-Chai
 He will not eat at the roadside café
 He is beyond rude, firing threats without filter
 Here to turn things around
 Accusations cling to his suit
 Nothing will be said—polite the upper hand
 And there will be agreement
 Because it is meant to be
 In a churlish moment I hold the notion
 This extreme heat will melt his thoughts
 Or Typhoon Talim's arrival tomorrow will blow his
 angry words away

Too much passion leads to dogma or war
 Anger its lightning rod
 Too little leads to apathy, collusion even
 I contemplate my place of balance
 Feel drawn to the hills
 Among birdsong and cotton trees
 Where there is a wider view
 To savour this wondrous life
 (In all its forms, be less of a judge)
 Make space to breathe in
 Openness, patience, humility
 Understanding and compassion
 Qualities to light my way
 Polish opacity until
 Only transparency remains

I ride the ferry from one island to another
 Notice the bar on the bench moves back and forth
 Choice of frontward direction
 Ingenious!
 Which way, which island, where am I?
 In forgetfulness
 Remembrance
 Movement becomes stillness
 Dissolving
 Returning to
 No division
 Ultimately
 The truth
 This is my practice

 This is my seeing

Upcoming Programs 2017-18



**The Open Path:
An Introduction with Pir Elias**
Weekend Workshop
Spirit Circles, Munich, Germany
October 7 - 8, 2017



Continuous Realization
Advanced Six-Month Retreat with Elias Amidon
Buckland Hall, Wales, UK
**April 15 - 18 and
October 7 - 10, 2018**



Two-Week Open Path Retreat
Nada Hermitage,
Crestone, Colorado
Elias Amidon
November 2 - 16, 2017



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



The Open Secret
Two-day program with Omar & Suzanne
Inayat-Khan and Elmer Koole
Soeficentrum Den Haag
The Hague/Den Haag, The Netherlands
November 24 - 25, 2017



The Ocean of Kindness
Five-day non-residential retreat
with Omar & Suzanne Inayat-Khan and Elmer Koole
Universel Murad Hasil, Katwijk, The Netherlands
June 20 - 24, 2018

