



Fresh Rain

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

S U M M E R 2 0 1 7

IN THIS ISSUE: *Essay by Rabi'a Roberts, Poetry by Jeanne Rana and Jan Richardson, Quotes by Sufi Inayat Khan and Pir Elias*



Dear Friends,

Our theme for this summer issue is "Service." I was amazed at the lack of response to this theme, and yet in pondering about it, I wonder if those of us in the United States and Great Britain are simply overwhelmed by the everyday political morass, and the rest of you are exhausted just watching us try to cope. Maybe we have been so busy serving we didn't find time to write.

Rabi'a Roberts brings us a longform essay called "Showing Up." Elias offers brief sayings on the topic of service. The poetry section is nourished by Jeanne Rana and Jan Richardson. Jeanne's "What We Need to Do Now" provides us all a gentle reminder. She reflects on Murshida Sitara in "How It Happened." Jan's "When We Breathe Together" reminds us of this simple blessing—shared breath. It's needed more now than ever. Mèhèra Bakker gives us two quotes from Sufi Inayat Khan: one on gratefulness, the other on inclusion.

The Fall issue's theme is "**Seeing Through Division.**" How do we hold this crazy world of ours? How can we respond and bring our deepest love and understanding to unimaginable events? Our responses must be rooted in piercing through apparent separation. How do you manage this?

At Winter solstice—? It feels as though world events are erupting so quickly, I have no idea of what to consider. I welcome suggestions and encourage you to write—you are the very heart of *Fresh Rain*. Please share with us.

I hope your summer is filled with kindness, and most of all, is open, transparent, lucid, and awake. This is the most important gift we bring.

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



Contents

Showing Up: Notes on Action in the World p. 2
– Rabi'a Roberts

what we need to do now: an invitation p. 5
– Jeanne Rana

When We Breathe Together p. 6
– Jan Richardson

how it happened p. 7
– Jeanne Rana

Upcoming Programs p. 8



SHOWING UP: Notes on Action in the World

by Rabi'a Roberts

Living a spiritual life has always included for me both an intensely inward, contemplative practice of liberation from my identifications and judgments, as well as the challenging aspect of outward service dedicated to justice in the world. No matter how much my own life over the years has become more serene and fulfilled, the world continues calling me to respond to its suffering.

How can I best serve? What action is appropriate? Should I serve in my neighborhood or in distant lands? The world's problems are so enormous, what can I do that might make a difference? I have often asked these kinds of questions myself, and I hear many others asking them as well. In these pages I would like to recount a few of the lessons I have learned during my life about spirit, service, and right action.

Several years ago, Elias and I met with the late Cambodian monk, Maha Ghosananda, in a Buddhist temple outside of Bangkok. He was known for his work in war-ravaged Cambodia where for years he led fellow monks and lay people on peace walks from village to village, encouraging the distressed population to build the spiritual and civic basis for safety, trust, and peace. During a decade of these walks he was accompanied by thousands of Cambodians, and others from Asia and around the world, walking through the countryside to support these aims. We met this saintly old monk in a garden of the temple and asked his advice: "How best can we serve our world?"

His simple answer became a fundamental guideline for our own work as activists. He said, "First you must show up. Be present to the suffering. Ask questions. Listen. Then what you are to do will become apparent. Right action will arise from this."

His words were a reminder that healing is an intimate act. We cannot do it from a distance. We can pass legislation and devise ambitious projects, yes, but enduring peace is built when people show up to each other's suffering and encounter each other in their vulnerability and common humanity.

We don't have to go far to practice this advice. Showing up in full presence to our aging parent or a troubled adolescent, or volunteering at a battered women's shelter, gives us an opportunity for compassionate, expressive action. These encounters stretch our hearts to embrace more of the world. They call us out of our comfort zone.

Four decades ago I went to Selma, Alabama, to work with Dr. Martin Luther King in the American civil rights movement. As part of our training to practice non-violence in face of threats from southern white people, he reminded us that our values are not created by what we read or think. They do not arrive from a sudden outbreak of emotion. Our values, Dr. King said, come from the perspective of what we see when we get out of bed in the morning. It is what we hear, see, and feel each day that determines our view of the world and our place within it. In the end we are moved by the circumstances we find ourselves in. Dr. King urged us to have compassion for the whites who were defending their racist worldview because when they woke up in



Those whose prayer is one of praise, if their whole life is to assume a prayerful attitude, they must carry this praise and gratitude into the smallest details of life, and feel grateful for the slightest act of kindness done to them by anybody... When a man has been able to attain this attitude of praise and thanksgiving for all things in life, then his life may indeed be called a prayerful life.

— Sufi Inayat Khan

*If you want to be free of your fear,
comfort someone.*

*If you want to be rid of your anxiety,
take care of something.*

— Pir Elias

the morning all they saw was the precarious nature of their sheltered lives and privileged positions. I knew from that point that regularly I would find ways to be with those less privileged than myself in order to open my heart to the realities of their lives.

And how do I show up? With my questions and commitment to listening. Each year I experience greater humility in the face of all I do not know. I do not try to “fix” those I encounter or persuade them to be different. I listen. Sometimes that is all I have to offer—simply a person willing to bear witness to someone else’s reality. In the early years of my work with Elias in the tribal lands of northern Thailand and Burma we asked a village elder, “What can we do for you?” I was expecting a request for money or medical supplies. The village elder replied, “We want our story heard.” Throughout our travels we have found that powerful healing is evoked in simply listening to a person’s story. Without engaging them from a preconceived position something magical happens when people feel truly heard. A bridge is built and one is no longer a private person concerned only with taking care of me and mine, or maintaining a point of view.

It became clear to us that what we had to give that might be of benefit for these tribal peoples was the ability to bring others to listen to them. For nine years we led “Interfaith Solidarity Walks” into the region bringing westerners and Asians to listen and learn from the Pagayaw (Karen) people. Today these Solidarity Walks still go on, led by a coalition of tribal young people and urban Thai activists. From the hundreds of gatherings and conversations that have occurred because of the Walks, many beneficial projects have been initiated and the tribal people themselves have developed increasing capacity to consider issues together and articulate their deepest concerns.



We had no idea how our lives could serve this situation when we made our first encounter. It would have been easy to think we weren’t prepared to respond to an unknown situation, especially since we hadn’t created a plan ahead of time. This is what we are taught at school and at work—be prepared! Have a plan and know how you can execute it. What I am suggesting here flies in the face of that advice. It suggests that problems can be solved creatively when we show up to them in an alert state of “un-knowing.” This approach requires faith, not only in ourselves but in the world as well.

Each situation has its own information embedded within the relationships that comprise it. If we are patient and curious the natural “intelligence” of the situation will reveal what is needed to heal those relationships. To be sensitive to this intelligence requires that we slow down and learn to hold the focus without needing to drive an agenda. We may need to wait for hours, weeks, or



Kindness is beautiful. Isn’t it true that the little acts of kindness you do—the unplanned acts that appear spontaneously, that are generous in themselves, that expect nothing, like when you make someone smile without any forethought on your part, or when you listen intently to someone who needs to have their feelings heard, or when you let someone move ahead of you in a line or in traffic—isn’t it true that these little kindnesses are beautiful in themselves, to both you and the one who receives them?

— Pir Elias

months for the moment when right action is clear. And we may not know for some time what success will look like when the action is complete.

Action that is creative in this way is an organic process. It rarely comes about all at once. The next step is only apparent when the previous one is completed. It is an iterative process with its own appropriate pace. This process can seem inefficient, even messy, as differing points of view are aired and debated, or trial projects are started and discarded. But working in this way allows people to explore their diverse ways of understanding what is happening. It also gives each of us more freedom to experiment with who we are and how we can best serve in a particular situation.

This kind of open-ended approach is not always welcome in modern fast-paced culture. Instead we are schooled to have clearly stated goals, to know what we want to have happen in the shortest possible time, and to have a plan for maneuvering others to our point of view. "Showing up" to the needs of a situation in the way I am describing may seem inefficient or even uncertain. Instead of pushing our beliefs, we listen to others; rather than trying to fix a situation we wait to see how we can best serve what is evolving. Serving a person or a problem in this way rests on the recognition that the nature of life is sacred and that its mystery requires our utmost humility as we engage in the work of healing. From the perspective of service we are all connected: all suffering

is like my suffering and all joy is like my joy. The impulse—and guidance—to serve our world emerges naturally and inevitably from this way of seeing.

In fact, "fixing" or "helping" is not a relationship between equals. In fixing we see others as broken. A fixer may see others as weaker than they are, needier than they are, and people often feel this implied inequality. The danger in fixing is that we may take away from people more than we give them. We may diminish their self-esteem, their sense of worth, integrity, or even wholeness.

When we try to fix people or situations we may feel our own strength, but when we serve we don't serve with our strength alone, we serve with our totality and we draw from all our experiences. Our limitations serve, our wounds serve, and even our darkness can serve. My pain is the source of my compassion; my woundedness is the key to my empathy. Service is a relationship between equals and it heals us as well as others. Seeking to fix the world is ultimately draining and over time we may burn out, while serving the world is renewing.

And we can't serve at a distance. We can only serve that to which we are profoundly connected—that which we are willing to touch. We serve life not because it is broken but because it is holy. We learn that our humanity is more powerful than our expertise alone. Personally I find this recognition liberating and the ground of a contemplative approach to living.



Beloved ones of God, you may belong to any race, cast, creed or nation, still you are all impartially beloved by God. You may be a believer or an unbeliever in God, but He cares not. His mercy and grace flow through all His powers, without distinction of friend or foe. — Sufi Inayat Khan

what we need to do now: an invitation

Shall we not

carry comfort in our handbags
walk in time with our breath
observe falling leaves
catch the rhythm of tides
sleep in moonlit/moonless nights
pray for dreams

Shall we not

carry on as we are able
walk this side of despair
observe our place in the Great Order
catch our breath at Beauty
sleep to renew ourselves
pray for forgiveness

Shall we not

carry the old, the young, the sick
walk in another's path to understand him
observe rituals for the turning of the year
catch only what we need
sleep when our work is complete
pray for peace

Shall we not continue

Shall we

– Jeanne Rana
11/20/04



When We Breathe Together

This is the blessing
we cannot speak by
ourselves.

This is the blessing we
cannot summon by our
own devices, cannot
shape
to our own purposes,
cannot bend
to our own will.

This is the blessing
that comes
when we leave behind
our aloneness, when we
gather together
when we turn toward
one another.

This is the blessing that
blazes amongst us when
we speak
the words strange to
our ears.

When we finally listen
into the chaos,
when we breathe together at
last.

— Jan Richardson



how it happened*for Sitara*

a woman once passed
 this way she was outwardly
 usual drove
 an ordinary car
 a woman you might
 meet at Sainsbury's or
 see on High Street in
 sensible shoes a slender
 body in understated clothes
 perhaps as a young woman she
 wore gloves she
 played the piano

this woman
 saw something to do
 and did it like a
 bird builds a nest
 it needed doing so
 "there you are, dear"

it was simple really
 while everyone was crying
 thinking arguing
 resisting or
 feeling the fullness and
 emptiness of existence
 she mowed the lawn
 baked cookies
 and then did
 something
 extraordinary

a woman once lived here
 became extraordinary a
 diamond
 if we live long do we all
 shine? she at the end
 was all light

she left us music
 a path through the woods
 she left us

a woman we love passed
 this way
 she left us
 a path
 a song

— Jeanne Rana
 7/7/04



Upcoming Programs 2017



Free Medicine Six-Day Retreat

Buckland Hall,
Wales, U.K.
Elias Amidon

June 25 – 30, 2017



Continuous Realization

Advanced Six-Month Retreat with Elias Amidon
Himmelreich Retreat Center, Germany

October 12 – 15, 2017



Vision Quest

Twelve-day program in wild nature
Mallorca
Balearic Islands, Spain

July 12 – 24, 2017



Two-Week Open Path Retreat

Nada Hermitage,
Crestone, Colorado
Elias Amidon

November 2 – 16, 2017



*You are given to give.
Give thanks.
Give praise.
Give love.
Give warmth.
Give forgiveness.
Give kindness.
Give.*

— Pir Elias