



Fresh Rain

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

WINTER 2018

IN THIS ISSUE: Essays by Andy Bayliss, Cheryl Getz, Yona Chavanne, and Ali MacArthur; Poetry by Sufi Inayat Khan, Kunderke Novveraz, Ayaz Angus Landman, Pir Elias, and Sabah Raphael Reed



Dear Friends,

Our theme for this Winter issue is **"Solitude."** Heartfelt thanks to Carol Barrow who fielded the contributions and funneled them to me. In the article section, Andy Bayliss explores the wilderness experience in "Solitude and Coming Home." Cheryl Getz, in "Searching for Solitude," opens to finding stillness within endless activity. In "The Exquisite Hour," Yona Chavanne probes the "momentless moment" as day ends and evening begins. Ali MacArthur's piece, "Musings on Solitude," comes after the poetry section due to its length. She reflects in depth on her NADA retreat last fall.

The poetry section includes an offering by Kunderke Novveraz, "Okavango Solitary," chronicling her time in Africa; Ayaz Landman's poem "Solitude;" and a poem by Sabah Raphael Reed titled "The Deeper Deep." Mèhèra Bakker gives us two selections from Sufi Inayat Khan. Thank you, Mèhèra!

The theme for the spring issue is **"Friendship."** I know we all have something to say about that, gifted as we are with the dearest of connections through this path. I continue to encourage you to write—you are the very heart of *Fresh Rain*. Please share with us. I hope your winter is filled with kindness and refreshing solitude, and that you ponder friendship on our behalf during that time.

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



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Solitude and Coming Home

by Andy Bayliss

I spend a lot of time in solitude. I live alone. I work on a mountain top as a fire lookout. I've spent many weeks at solitary retreat in wilderness. I return to solitude time after time with an urge to be myself, without the input from—and my internal reactions to—the outside world.

So I go to quiet places to be alone, and find out what is most real. Is there a real loving presence? Am I aliveness itself? Or is my familiar stream of reactions and efforting as good as it gets?

When I first return to solitude I see clearly, and to my dismay, a whole mountain of self-images, reactions, and strategies which are all employed in an attempt to create a safe, loving place. I think this “mountain” is my version of tools picked up unconsciously by every child throughout time, gathered to cobble together something which might keep us “in the field of love” of our parents.

These tools, however, only bring a facsimile of love: an echo or memory which needs constant maintenance and monitoring. In solitude, this facsimile is easily exposed as a substitute, often leaving me in grief and desperation.

Yet with time, and grace, a real loving presence might arrive on its own. I think my personality begins to understand more clearly that its ways of relating to experience—and particularly the ways it tries to get love—are not working. I might wish the sky to be a brilliant blue because then I'd feel loved, and I feel hurt if it isn't. I become angry at the conditions, and even attack myself, but the sky remains itself. This is a deep gift of solitude: the strategies relax because they are easier to see as self-generated, and they expose themselves as being ineffective. The sky just is.

This understanding allows loving presence to arrive without much real effort, except to live as best I can in the moment, with a fair amount of patience.

As solitude deepens, vibrant experiences of Love often arrive. Painful experiences of “lack of Love” come and go too. This “coming and going” of Love is a deep teaching which breaks my heart again and again. With grace, this heartbreak brings a quiet, natural friendship with myself. Where love is truly seen to be needed, it arrives.

You're up early, watching the lenticulars form over the Sangre de Christos, their western edges fine, forming windward—white, blue, gray translucent feathers.

You're waiting for Love my friend, something Great to fill your Great Empty Longing.

I'll wait with you, if that's OK.
I like sitting here with you.

Solitude does what my busy life seemingly can't do: exposes strategies which don't work, and reveals love, which requires no strategy. And without strategies, things inside and out become themselves.

The trees and sky are being themselves, fully, and now I am noticing! They are deeply pleasing all in themselves. Everything wants to be opened up and experienced just as it is. I am also invited to be myself, inside and out, enjoying whatever miraculous flavors show up.

This all pervading tenderness doesn't know so much.
Caring even before words...
Barely here, so light.
It is easy to miss!
Still being Itself after all these years.
I have missed you.

I am becoming curious about real solitude in my normal surroundings, including in the company of others. Can I enjoy this life, just as it arrives, without having to do, or be a particular way? Can I allow this life to be itself, already complete?



Searching for Solitude

By Cheryl Getz

Several years ago I was on retreat in Crestone and I read a collection of essays by Brother David Steindl-Rast left in my cabin, on *contemplative life and community*. I enjoyed it so much I wrote down the title of the book, *A Listening Heart*, but I never went back to it until now. Reflecting on the meaning of solitude, this was the time to purchase the book to read the complete essay. To my surprise, in the foreword Brother David explained that he removed one section that he felt did not fit: *contemplative life and community*—the essay that I was looking for was no longer available. Quite surprised (and disappointed), I try another route. I look up the etymology of solitude and learn it comes from the Latin *solitudinem*, or loneliness, being alone, or a lonely place. Feeling as if my search was incomplete, I walk away and save it for another day.

Returning and this time deeply listening to the message of the moment, as Brother David says, I open to the *Source of Meaning* that continues to unfold in this experience of searching for solitude. Somehow I thought if I took the time to understand others' views of solitude,



and if I thought more deeply about it, I would find solitude. I am curious now why I even agreed to write about solitude. Where and how can I find solitude in my life now as a caregiver for my husband? Our home has always been a quiet, peaceful sanctuary. Now it is a lively space for caregivers, full of notebooks, charts, and medical supplies. They call this life our *new normal*—yet it is anything but normal to me.

I have certainly felt alone in the last year of our *new normal*, even when the house is full of people and chatter; a solitary feeling of uncertainty often engulfs my thoughts. And solitude as a *state of being alone without feeling lonely* is much harder to grasp these days, because I am *never* fully *alone*. But today as I write, a moment of clarity, and I understand that solitude is not something I need to grasp. And it's not helpful to look *out there* for understanding solitude—when it has been right here, with me all along.

On being present, Pir Elias reminds us to stay with the first moment, and recognize when our thoughts hook us. I reflect now on my own thinking about solitude and the search that continued to hook me. I looked up the definition, then the etymology, and I searched for answers in several books.

Maybe I don't need to know what solitude is, sitting in a place of not knowing, or unknowing what I think I've learned about solitude. I am having an experience of solitude right now, in this moment. Similar to *the first moment*, when I try to grasp, to search for solitude, it seems like the possibility for experiencing solitude slips away. Looking back I notice the possibilities for solitude are endless; it's been here all along. In *this* moment, I'm writing; it's quiet in a room by myself. I don't have to be distracted by the endless activity around me.

Maybe this really is our *new normal*, where solitude can be found in the tiny moments of letting go, in feeling alone while fully embracing my surroundings, and feeling lonely even when I am rarely alone. This writing has helped me see that solitude is possible even in my new normal.

*Hold this moment in your heart
and it will hold you the same.*

— Pir Elias

The Exquisite Hour

by Yona B. Chavanne

The exquisite hour (in French "*l'heure exquise*") is tasteful like a haiku, a *long* silent haiku with no wording.

Nondual, she usually unfolds better in solitude, profound and light, smiling and grave at the same time.

In her moment, everything opens. Outside, inside do not really differ.

The exquisite hour often happens "*entre chiens et loups*," "between dogs and wolves"—an expression portraying day slowly breaking into evening ... into night.... Silence pervades. All is felt as one. Purring engines in the street, people driving back from work; soft darkness of the young night; colored windows behind soon-to-be naked trees; young children playing next door. Strong wind, a crow landing heavily on the balcony. Golden leaves dancing their way down to nourish Earth, towards a new Spring, a renewed greenness, a new "*loving more*."

She is a pointer. Could she be one of Allah's messengers? Who is she?

Freedom? Liberty? The deep presence of an unknown meaning?

She is tenderness of being, an invisible being, warm and compassionate.

She quietly deconstructs our conventions, so softly that we are not aware of it. Our human psyche full of stories relaxes and fades out. She quietly undoes.

What is she? Is she really a she, or a he, or an it? Does it really matter?

A sense of vacuity pervades. An intuitive push from nowhere.

I breathe ... breathe from a boundless reservoir of space and air and light, my heart liberated for a timeless moment from the world's contractions. Nothing seems to be happening, but this vacuity isn't boring. The cosmos in which we have existence is vast, awesome, mysterious....

On an ancient orphic tablet, one reads: "I am the child of Earth and the starry Sky."

Most often, the exquisite hour leaves without notice. A new moment arrives. Whatever it brings, may I welcome it with an open heart!



Okavango Solitary

by Kunderke Noverraz

The Okavango delta is a wondrous unspoiled land of water and wild animals in the northern part of Botswana. Every year river waters coming all the way from Angola create a vast delta in an otherwise very arid region. As this also coincides with the dry season, all the wild animals migrate for the season to this land of crystal clear water, papyrus reeds and small islands. As it is prohibited to bring guns into the area there is a relative peace between human and animal and it is possible to come much closer on foot to many animals than would otherwise be possible. For human visitors it is like a return to Eden. I had the good fortune to participate in two Wilderness retreats in this area. We were a small group and walked and were transported in canoes from island to island, where we would camp out in the open for the night. But most wonderful of all for me were the "Solitaries." The guides would find a place where you could sit alone for a few hours and be with the wilderness in a meditative way. They would be observing from a distance, on the watch for danger, but not visible to the retreatant. My place for the solitary was a high termite mound from which I had a good view over the watery plain in front of me.

As I sit alone
The African earth in its great beauty
Begins to enfold me.
Clear petals of light and sound and silence
Wrap around my busy mind
Until I feel tenderly held by the deep soul of this land.
In here I begin to know stillness

And the ancient life pushing within my cells.
In here I begin to find
The right measure of my existence
And know that I am no queen to rule and control,
But a mere ant directed by forces unseen toward a
purpose unknown.*
In here I begin to sense that soon I will be no more.

I wait.....

The great plain of water and grass
Begins to throb with inner life.
The bird with its piercing cry flies close
to sit beside me.
A splash to my left as a giraffe
Moves in relief against the near horizon.

I listen.....

Behind me the yells of a mischievous Baboon child
Being chastised.
Far away Red Lechwe are moving terracotta shapes
Against the green.
Thoughts are now few.
This moment is all there is,
The city far, far and gone.
The giraffe loping across the plain

**The termite community, inhabiting one of the tall mounds that are everywhere in this environment, is like one organism with the queen as the brain and procreative power while the workers scurry under her direction.*



Follows her way while
 I sit here waiting without waiting.
 Any moment this deep peace
 Could be transfigured by a call of alarm,
 The stark rush of fight or flight—the awesome encounter.
 But mind no longer anticipates in fear,
 And as the jagged edges go
 Trust allows me to receive what is given.

A stork steps through shallow water,
 Its legs lifted with precision.
 Yellow patched eyes, red beak, black wings, white throat,
 The label “endangered species” of no relevance at this time.

Now the light begins to fade
 And the sun sinks in a translucent sky
 To the rim of bushes.
 A great anticipation rises.
 Cricket choruses hum.
 A flock of white birds fly to a far horizon.
 A lone hornbill calls out.
 A flock of black birds fly to another far horizon.

It is still light but the almost full moon
 Has risen in the darkening pink sky.
 Frogs and fruitbats join in a loud tinkling song
 That covers the watery land.

The sound of a branch cracking.
 Elephant!
 A growling roar.
 Elephant!
 It is far enough and I am not roused.
 Across the plain the giraffe is still circling on her path.

Siphiwe calls softly. It is time to go.
 Human fire and company wait for me
 As the dark night descends
 And the lion comes to claim his rightful place.

• • • • •

Later I hear that a breeding herd of elephant had walked
 by close behind me. They had moved so delicately that
 there was no sound.



*Within the house there's a room
 and within the room a human being.
 Within the human being there's a heart
 and within the heart a light.
 That light fills the universe entire.*

— Pir Elias

*I cannot feel your pain
 and you cannot know mine,
 but here, in this moment
 we are consoled together.*

— Pir Elias

Solitude

If I can trust the bell enough
To take on the early morning mist
And follow
The quiet faith of the robin
I will be led by and by
To no outward gift
But nothing less
Than the golden altar
Of my becoming
Your bride.

— Ayaz Angus Landman



The Deeper Deep

The Ego must have its purpose, and substance and form;
a shoal of imaginings, of longings, of preferences, of opinions—
fleet in the water, forging the waves.

But inside this carapace of certainties, what breathes there?
What coalesces in the soft sweet underbelly of self?
What constitutes the pearl?

Pause.

Then touch, tenderly, the formless ecology of open awareness.
Break open to that mystical reef,
fall to the deeper deep—

become grains of emptiness
churning, turning
in synchrony
across
the
vast
ocean
floor.

—Sabah Raphael Reed



What was it in the wilderness that gave peace and joy?
What was it that came to us in the forest, the solitude?
In either case it was nothing else but the depth of our own life
which is silent like the depths of the great sea,
so silent and still.
It is the surface of the sea that makes waves and roaring breakers;
the depth is silent.
So the depth of our own being is silent also
And this all-pervading, unbroken
inseparable, unlimited,
ever-present, omnipotent silence,
unites with our silence like the meeting of flames.

— Sufi Inayat Khan

I went through the thick forests of perpetual desire
I crossed the running rivers of longing
I passed through the deserts of silent suffering,
I climbed the steep hills of continual strife.
Feeling ever some presence in the air, I asked:
“Are you there my love?”
And a voice came to my ears, saying,
“No, still further am I.”

— Sufi Inayat Khan



Musings on Solitude

while on retreat at Nada Hermitage, Crestone, Colorado—November 2017

by Ali MacArthur

The night before the retreat starts I am staying in Crestone. At midnight I gaze into the vast sky riddled with stars and galaxies so deep, bright, and clear—suddenly I am utterly absorbed into the depths until “I” no longer exist. Next morning I am shaky and somewhat “cracked open”—and this is only the beginning of my retreat.

On a solitary walk, I come upon three tiny stone structures made with a doorway so small I wonder who could ever enter or leave. Maybe they were each built around a dying person so they could pass in peace and solitude—their spirit able to leave via the little doorway?

Arriving at my little hermitage where I will live alone for two weeks, I reach to close the blinds to shut out the pitch blackness when suddenly a huge silver orb peeps over the top of the looming mountains. A few seconds earlier and I would have missed this awesome spectacle illuminating the darkness and smiling tenderly down at this Earth, bathing us in her bright, benevolent gaze. She keeps me company until I fall asleep.

It is morning—I sit at my corner window watching the sunlight creep across the valley far below, turning the shadowy land into a golden desert carpet. An ancient, gnarled, broken juniper looks down onto the back of my cabin: its centuries of life breathe its life energy through its twisted, shapely branches into my heart. I visit this wonderful tree—place my hands on its trunk and it speaks to me: “Experience my wisdom through your hands and express that through your Being.”

The wind howls around my cabin, moving trees, grasses, alpine desert cacti, and bushes all around. It speaks: “Feel my power blowing through the air around you. I am flying, dancing, shouting for joy!”

Sitting at my window I watch the little birds dancing, flapping, and drinking in the water bowl I put outside.

It has snowed overnight: this morning is still after the exhilarating wind of the past few days. The silence on my morning walk is intense and penetrating. I hear a lone bird singing to its mate from a high tree until he flies to join her in a mutual swooping

aerial dance. Suddenly, a rabbit stops and turns to face me as I gently greet it. We gaze at each other for a few moments; I continue speaking gently; then it lifts its front paws and starts washing its face—completely relaxed. Every animal I meet is so relaxed and void of mistrust or fear as they gaze at me gazing at them. We are relaxation and stillness together.

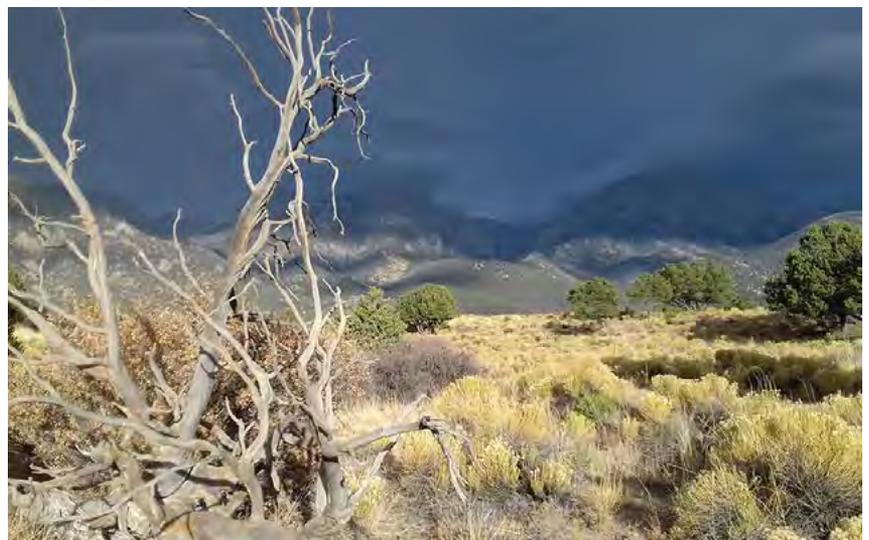
In solitude we are never alone.

Sitting outside my hermitage on the sandy earth, absorbing the majestic beauty of the snow-capped mountains, I wonder “Why are these mountains perceived as beautiful?” A response arises, “...because we have been gifted with the eyes and the heart to see and feel their beauty.” This deep sense of beauty and gratitude is experienced as all-encompassing Love, differentiating between no-thing and no-one.

In solitude arises the memory of giving birth to my first child forty-eight years ago today. Out of that miraculous event has grown a beautiful caring adult who I am lucky enough to call my son.

In solitude I feel my heart beating slowly, loudly, and heavily—knocking as if to demand my attention. I offer it blessings and gratitude for its constancy in keeping me alive for almost seventy years. I also acknowledge how much harder it is working at this altitude, helping my body to be stronger.

Solitude allows me to drop my grip on the constant mind chatter and become aware of Awareness in the silence which permeates everything, including myself. My Being senses depth—a magnetic pull into the earth and also into the mountains, and a smile appears within me. The



earth, the mountains, and I merge together into the smile as it arises.

Energy is experienced as density in empty space. It is never still but constantly moving in waves. In silence and stillness, I feel energy pulsating in waves in and above my hands and up my arms. It seems that air itself is full of life energy as it is drawn into and released out of every living thing. The human mind in all its brilliance can never control the immensity of this conscious intelligence.

Solitude—is listening to music and REALLY HEARING IT—eating and REALLY TASTING.

In my solitude I never feel lonely. The sky is a pale translucent blue, patterned by fluffy white and yellow streaks of cloud. As the sun disappears behind the mountains, some snow still lies under the trees in hollows which have not been directly warmed by the sun's rays. Today I meet a great stag, his antlers making the foliage swing back and forth as he passes under the trees. What a majestic and beautifully relaxed creature he is. I bow to him; he dips his head and paws the ground in my direction in acknowledgement of my greeting.

Breathe in Silence;
Breathe out Love.

Solitude... today allows me to feel and bear the painful memory of having caused hurt to someone I dearly love. How challenging to stay with this pain and not push it away, allowing myself to release it and soften. I offer it up to Awareness and meditate on forgiveness. This is a beautiful practice that I know I shall have to do again and again.

Everything arises in solitude. It offers no distractions from memories, life reviews, and painful or joyful emotions as insights appear. In solitude I can hide nothing from myself, nor do I need to. In solitude I can be with the process of seeing whatever I need to see and understand. Compassion and Love can find their way into my broken heart and create healing and acceptance.



Breathe in Mercy;
Breathe out Love.

Solitude... on the path in twilight, adoring the luminous sunset behind eight deer and the big stag, all-one together.

Solitude... being awakened at night by howling coyotes.

Solitude... me and the desert grasses—yellowness growing out of the yellow sandy earth—some as delicate as a baby's breath, some like the crooked finger of my grandmother beckoning us in for tea, others growing proud and tall with thick stems ending in a dusty yellow prickly flower which, when the wind blows, lets its seeds fly far and wide.

Solitude... my last morning is a time of gratitude, awe, silence, and devotion—being aware of the Great Silence imbuing everything; a quiet surprise as I recognise that this is not a personal feeling or experience that belongs to me, it simply IS—quiet, steady, and constant with no emotion attached; everything in existence IS THIS.

I bow to this awesome landscape in every direction, deeply honoring all I have experienced and received here.

Deep gratitude also to Pir Elias Amidon, The Sufi Way and Nada Hermitage for making these retreats possible.

*The path you take today will leave no trace
like a drawing made on water.
Your neighbor will wave and then forget who passed by.
A leaf falls and quietly joins the ancestors.
These images are already gone
but your intimacy is not.*

— Pir Elias

*If you could put words to that song
your life is humming, the one you think no one hears,
the one that makes you so lovable — that song —
all the poets of the past would bow to you
for being able to say what they could not.*

— Pir Elias

Upcoming Programs 2018



Continuous Realization

Three evening programs and a one-day intensive with Pir Elias in Boulder, CO, USA

Seminar: February 3, 2018

Evening programs: Jan. 7, Jan. 21, Feb 2, 2018



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

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

April 15 – 18 and

October 7 – 10, 2018



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

