



Fresh Rain

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

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IN THIS ISSUE: Reflections on "The Music of Life" by Sufi Inayat Khan, Mèhèra Bakker, Karim Noverraz, Kiran Rana, and Pir Elias; poems by Jeanne Rana and Angus Landman



Dear Friends,

In this issue we explore "The Music of Life." Mehera Bakker found the beautiful offerings from Sufi Inayat Khan to share with us. Great gratitude to her! Her article, "Listening, the First Step to Awareness" takes us to the heart of the matter, our willingness to not know. Karim Noverraz also speaks to his process of receptiveness as he approaches music. Kiran Rana broadens our view by addressing all music as sacred. Elias closes the articles with a piece from 2002, showing us how music unifies even people at war.

Jeanne Rana, in a poem called "A Voice Lesson," takes us inside rag Bharavi, and then wider, into the music of life itself. Angus Landman addresses other forms of listening and noticing.

The Winter issue theme is "Death and Dying"—both metaphorical and actual. In the Spring issue, let's explore "Community."

Deep thanks to all our contributors.

with love to you all,
Amrita
editor, Fresh Rain: freshrain@sufiway.org

PS: If you have not yet contributed a brief bio for our "Meeting Each Other" section, could you please email me and let me know? It's a sweet way for us to learn about one another.



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I Have Become His Flute

— SUFI INAYAT KHAN



I gave up my music because I had received from it all that I had to receive. To serve God one must sacrifice what is dearest to one; and so I sacrificed my music. I had composed songs; I sang and played the vina; and practicing this music I arrived at a stage where I touched the Music of the Spheres. Then every soul became

for me a musical note, and all life became music. Inspired by it I spoke to the people, and those who were attracted by my words listened to them instead of listening to my songs.

Now, if I do anything, it is to tune souls instead of instruments; to harmonize people instead of notes. If there is anything in my philosophy it is the law of harmony: that one must put oneself in harmony with oneself and with others. I have found in every word a certain musical value, a melody in every thought, harmony in every feeling; and I have tried to interpret the same thing, with clear and simple words, to those who used to listen to my music. I played the vina until my heart turned into this very instrument; then I offered this instrument to the divine Musician, the only musician existing. Since then I have become His flute; and when He chooses, He plays His music. The people give me credit for this music, which in reality is not due to me but to the Musician who plays on His own instrument!

Listening, the First Step to Awareness

— MÈHÈRA BAKKER

In the last ten years, my life has been a joyous exploration to come to the understanding of what it means to unlearn. It all came clear through an experience of deep listening. I had behind me years of learning music with discipline, of feeling, analyzing and listening. Although there had been many gaps between my playing and not playing, music was always somewhere with me, like an old friend.

In the Open Path we learn to open into Openness, to relax, to be in the now, to be silent and still, and to listen....

The impact of the teaching of Pir Elias revealed itself while I was playing music. One day I spontaneously sat down to play, without an agenda. There was only deep listening. Without my interfering, music could unfold itself. I was totally absorbed in what was going on—it was as if the music was speaking to me and I responded by doing only what needed to be done. Letting the music speak for itself gave me a deep feeling of intimacy and an incredible joy.

My search of many years of how a piece should be played had come to an end. By giving up the search, by accepting not knowing, I allowed the

music to become alive, to let it tell its own story. It only required from me to be open and listen.

The Open Path and the experience with music affected my daily life. Letting it flow, exerting less control, creating less worries about all that has to be done. In fact, more gets done when it comes from a place of openness and quietness.



The Inner Experience of a Spiritual Musician

— KARIM NOVERRAZ

I stand in front of my friends, ready to start playing. Patient and receptive, they watch—eager to listen to me. What do they want to hear? I assume they aspire to the very music I have in my heart: I am not inclined to sophisticated arrangements, to virtuosity or intricate harmonic progressions. My heart simply longs to share a deep friendship. Soothing and calming those who listen, taking them into swaying rhythms and invigorating melodies, embarking them into stories that are too real to be told with words.

The one in me who will play in a minute is the one who wants to show Nature, its beauty and its power. It is the one who wants to celebrate the intense network of sonorous vibrations that we are all part of and that carry us from experience to experience. The beauty of the experience. The experience of the beauty.

The moment has come. I close my eyes; I invoke my inner Sarasvati, Goddess of music. I breathe a few seconds and I start with a long low note. My friends gently drop their chattering. This initial sound has immediately redefined, re-adjusted in us all, the overall sensation of space and time. It is the most important note in the musical piece I will offer today.

While keeping it soft and intense, I slowly explore the spaciousness of the sound in me and in the listeners. I do not know more than they do what I will play next. I add upper tones to produce a more shimmering pitch. I play one or two quick ornaments only to delineate this long sustained note and come back to it. But the ornaments have awakened the longing for other notes which begin to emerge out of the initial one.

They call for one another, forming phrases that alternately express like questions and responses. They seem to want to go somewhere. They expand into a melody which, once asserted, unveils a new luminous sound. This new note brings a release as if we had been waiting for it to come. I remain with it a long time, reflecting its radiance as if we were bathing in a sea of light.

Now I play the main melodic line. This is a tune that tries to convey that all what happens in one's life and that seems so important, in fact hardly makes a difference to Reality except in the recognition of the One. Translated into words, this tune would go as follows:



*Righteous or treacherous acting hardly differ
from such a distance.*

*The peace of a caressing sunbeam, the wrath of an
injustice,*

*sweet memories at most once you stand here
in front of Your own Self.*

*Coming to grips with reality, aspiring to perfection,
will seem like games of vanity at the most.*

Loving your beloved, loving being—

this even may cease when

it has become clear

where the "You" belongs—

drop in wave in sea

in One.

I kind of recite the words in me while playing. When I reach the "You," I break the rhythm and stay long on the high note. This is the peak of the tune. The listeners and I are actually experiencing the same infinite and eternal awe of the "You."

Then the melody unwinds itself until it appears to breathe out. But we feel the story of this graceful melody wants to go further. So I inhale and return to the tune again. So it goes on until the musical drop has merged back into the wave which merges back into the sea so that only the "You" remains.

There Is Music in the Depth of Our Being

— SUFI INAYAT KHAN



All the religions have taught that the origin of the whole of creation is sound.

When one looks at the cosmos, the movements of the stars and planets, the law of vibrations and rhythm, all perfect and unchanging. It shows that the cosmic system is working by the law of music, the law of harmony.

Music is behind the working of the whole universe.

What we call music in our everyday language is only a miniature, which our intelligence has grasped from that music or harmony of the whole universe which is working behind everything, and which is the source and origin of nature.

What makes us feel drawn to music is that our whole being is music; our mind and body, the nature in which we live, the nature which has made us, all is beneath and around us; it is all music.

We say that we enjoy nature. But what is it in nature that we enjoy? It is music. Something has been touched by the rhythmic movement, by the perfect harmony.

Music . . . is life itself.

Sacred

— KIRAN RANA

Many years ago, as I was either getting ready to make my way from east to west in search of freedom, or shortly after I had landed somewhere enchanting, like on a beach in southern Crete, I read one of Kurt Vonnegut's brilliant, profound, eccentric books called *Breakfast of Champions*. Someone later told me that it isn't that highly regarded among his works, but when I read it I was under the influence of a mind-altering substance and it seemed to me the epitome of wry wit and twisted wisdom.

One of the lines that stuck with me was—he is listing things that really matter to him, and he writes: "What else is sacred? Oh, yes—all music is."

That was it. For a moment I rebelled—all those choices I had made, the names I had taught myself, the magazines I had read, those passionate arguments, the carefully honed judgments . . . and really, you mean Pat Boone? and that nasal high-pitched country music? what about some of that Bollywood stuff? and that really high-pitched, nasal Chinese stuff? . . . But something in me knew I had lost and he was right. Maybe it was my expanded consciousness willing to embrace all, and yes there have been and still are times when I say to myself, Really? or, Yes, but...? But something irrevocable happened. A door opened, then it closed behind me and a key turned and I couldn't go back. I will never be able to forget that somewhere deep inside I know and believe and even treasure the truth that all music is sacred. David Bowie, Gregory Ligeti, Astor Piazzolla, Anoushka Shankar, Sachin Dev Burman, Babu Meraj, Elton John Coltrane Satchmo Wolfgang Marian Anderson Erik Satie oh dear God, Barbra Streisand! All, all, All-ahhhh....

I wish I could tell you what it feels like, really feels like in body and heart, to be that fully accepting of something. And the gift it is! You have companions, playmates, lovers for several lifetimes.

It's a great liberation and a huge responsibility. I can continue to prefer and choose and judge and even complain, and I have somewhere in me a clear understanding that none of it has any effect at all . . . the intactness of "All music"—even in its little incarnation as a manipulative Disney-fied song selling something—has a power and a magic, and somewhere a majesty, that I can't touch, affect, defile. And every time I carp and complain I know I will be called down the line somewhere to account, to eat crow, to see the beauty, the appeal and heart-opening power in that very piece I disrespected. And I will be shown . . . what? The sacred? What does she look like? She makes me smile.

The liberation and responsibility are another kind of gift too. They invite-allow-compel me to sing, to make music, to connect to that invisible ocean right next to this world and drink and swim and play and surf and be foolish and make mistakes and take chances and step back away from my critic and my stage-fright and my "Oh no" voices and sing along with a young Bobby Dylan, "It's Alright, Ma, I'm Only Dyin'." Yes, the sacred is a death – but really, a death that's all right, a death of limitation, a dying into a deeper embrace.

Sometimes I have to do the reminding myself. The sacred is busy, doesn't hang around taking care of you at all times; sometimes you have to wait, maybe days, maybe months. While you wait, you can listen to some music.

The following is an excerpt from the first "Letter from the Road" written in 2002 from Baghdad where my wife, Rabia, and I had gone to join the Iraq Peace Team. We were there to help raise awareness in the world media of the human cost of the impending U.S. invasion. (The full text, and other Letters from the Road, can be found at www.pathofthefriend.org.)

Dancing in the Streets

— ELIAS AMIDON

BAGHDAD, IRAQ, November 2002

We arrive in Baghdad at 1 AM in the morning to a decaying six-story hotel next to the Tigris River. The lobby smells of kerosene used to wash the floors in the absence of detergent. A monkey behind the registration counter climbs to the top of his cage and peers at us curiously as we surrender our passports. A parrot sleeps in another cage, her head buried in shoulder feathers.

In the morning we drive across Baghdad to visit a children's hospital, getting to see the city for the first time in the morning light. Though it looks generally like I imagined, I am shocked by the recognition that this is the capital city of the "enemy." The neighborhoods are a jumble of two- and three-story buildings, tired and dusty, strung with makeshift electrical and phone wires, the sidewalks broken. There are larger buildings here and there, some in better shape, but the overall impression is one of exhaustion—the city is exhausted and worn out. The cab we ride in is a good example. The dashboard has a large section broken off, the inner panel of the door is missing, as is the window crank, the speedometer doesn't work, and the body is an assemblage of colors, its sections repaired over time from different wrecks. It reminds me of Managua and Havana, other erstwhile enemy cities brought down by American sanctions. On the streets are thousands of vehicles like our cab, all groaning forward, belching smoke, sagging buses with dirty windows and dented sides, filled with people who fit the overall theme of the city, tired and cheerless.

This is our enemy? This is what the U.S. considers a threat to the geopolitical balance of power in the world? It is incomprehensible. Now as I write this we have been here for four days and have made several trips around the city—this impression has only grown stronger. The U.S. wants to bomb this place? What misguided cruelty is this? I think of Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, and Paul Wolfowitz gliding around Washington in their sleek black limousines on smooth roads with curbs, tidy tree-lined streets, impressive buildings whose windows are washed on schedule, carpets vacuumed each evening, with their computers humming with vast interconnected



information systems. Here in Baghdad completing a simple telephone call is a major achievement. The contrast, and the trumped-up Iraqi threat, borders on the absurd. We fear a myth.

I keep hoping against hope that my government's only motive is to eradicate Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. But when an Iraqi I meet at the hotel asks me, "If the inspectors find no weapons here, will the U.S. not attack us?" I find I cannot assure him they won't.

Two days ago several of us went out to the U.N. headquarters to hold a vigil, a daily occurrence. We stood next to the busy highway holding banners which read, "No U.S. War on Iraq!," "Peace" in English and Arabic, "Let Iraq Live!" etc. Cars honked, drivers waved. The Iraqi guards around the U.N. building were solemn-faced. After about fifteen minutes two cars arrived delivering several reporters hung with cameras and microphones.

Then a bus drove up and out spilled a most amazing sight—twenty Italian musicians with drums, saxophones, violin, tambourines, and they immediately greeted us with rambunctious, infectious gaiety! In a moment they were wailing away wild jazzy tunes, dancing up and down, laughing and grinning. They had come to Iraq for the week as ambassadors of good will, and good will it was! The scene quickly became something out of the sixties—everybody grinning, dancing, the guy on the saxophone bobbing and jumping, his eyes squeezed shut. Cars pulled over, people got out, more soldiers came out of the buildings to keep a lid on things, but the Italians were irrepressible. Soon even the soldiers were grinning and clapping to the music, posing for photographs with the musicians, and everybody was interviewing everybody, the buttoned-up lady from the Christian Peacemaker Team was surrounded by Italian drummers, each taking snapshots of each other, everybody was laughing, swaying, clapping—as if, for a moment, all of us forgot the poverty, the need, the threat of war, and peace just broke out, happy careless loving peace, right there on the side of the road.



A Voice Lesson

in Indian music
 the space between the notes melts
 we sing rag Bharavi
 and subtle by subtle
 slip up from SA to RE to GA

in music
 we can slide up
 against gravity
 tho gravity as a musical construct
 is just a thought
 up and down the scale
 could just as easily be
 round and round
 or curving horizontally
 like Snake
 slithering

these places between notes
 not silence but the tones
 blending
 a rainbow
 where exactly does red meet orange?
 a bleed a bleeding

I love it
 how we can ooze up or down the scale
 and now...
 the big slide
 or a jump!

Sing in your home range
 we all live best when we don't strain
 could be true...
 slip sliding around in our
 home on the range
 low voice practice
 extends our boundaries
 the voice opens
 the rooms are bigger inside
 than you could imagine

Build many mansions, oh my soul
 let the song carry you
 forever
 across this life where
 friends die
 children carry guns
 trash cans explode
 across the street
 and a man stands
 on the corner with a cardboard sign:

HOMELESS VET
 HUNGRY

he can easily be passed by
 one teaching from the Indian scale:
 every tone bleeds into the next
 nothing need be forgotten

roll down the window
 give the man a fiver
 he exists
 between the notes
 his song different from yours
 and just as beautiful

— Jeanne Rana
 4/15/13



It's My Job

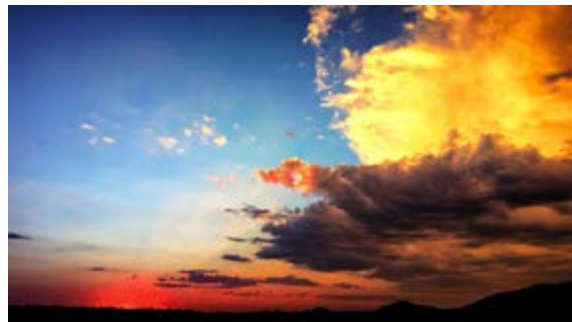
I'm sorry
I can't help it
At day break
It's my job
(For the time being at least)
To hang around
At the back door
Kicking dust
And bursting blisters
Feeding on scraps
With the dogs
It's my job
To be on hand
With my empty pages
Ready at any moment
To write down
What you tell me

— Angus Landman

It's so easy to get lost

It's so easy to get lost
in the detail
The scrapes and scraps
Of everyday bloodletting
The angle of the sun
The shape of the clouds
Knowing You
I come to know
Your story
From the inside out

— Angus Landman



Meeting Each Other

With each issue of Fresh Rain we will include a few short biographical sketches and photos of Sufi Way initiates. Since many of us are scattered in different places on the globe, this is one way we can introduce ourselves to each other—along with speaking together

on teleconferences or, if we're lucky, meeting each other at a program or retreat. If you would like to introduce yourself like this, send a photo and a 200-word (or less) bio written in the first person to: freshrain@sufiway.org



Dan Adamson

Hello Open Path people, friends and not-yet-friends :) I'm Dan. Like many of you, I've wandered around the world a fair bit. Over the last couple of decades I've worked as a carer for people with disabilities, as a potter in Spain, as a tour guide in the Italian hills,

and for NGOs in the Middle East.

It was there, in Syria, in 2006, that I met Elias. By that stage I'd read about quite a few different traditions and

teachers, most of them centuries old, but never felt able to swallow a pre-prepared meal of beliefs. I was relieved when Elias didn't ask me to.

I've now come back to England after years in the West Bank, and am I working primarily as a journalist. Life is pretty busy, but thanks to what I've learned from all of you on the Open Path retreats, even the busyness seems to appear from and vanish into a kind of frictionless quiet. For that, I'm more grateful than I can say.



Upcoming Programs 2015 – 16



Living Sufism

The 2015-16 Living Sufism teleconference series will begin in early October, 2015. Notification of the 2015-16 schedule will be sent to everyone on our mailing list.



2016 9-Month Open Path Training — Austria

An in-depth training to introduce you to the direct experience of pure awareness
Starting March 2016



Wilderness Quest

A nine-day rite-of-passage in the Canyonlands of Utah
Elias Amidon and Rabia Elizabeth Roberts
September 25 – October 4, 2015



A Joyous Cosmology

4-day Advanced Open Path Retreat
Croydon Hall, Somerset, United Kingdom
March 17 – 20, 2016



Coming of Age

A retreat on embracing our aging and mortality
Nada Hermitage, Crestone, Colorado
Elias Amidon and Rabia Elizabeth Roberts
November 12 – 19, 2015



Open Path Intensive Retreat

(Full; waiting list only)
Two-week intensive retreat
Nada Hermitage, Crestone, Colorado
May 5 – 19, 2016



Some Hint of Emptiness

The Exploring our relationship with emptiness
The Hague/Den Haag, Netherlands
Omar and Suzanne Inayat Khan, Elmer Koole
November 27 – 28, 2015



A Joyous Cosmology

4-day Advanced Open Path Retreat
Himmelreich Retreat Center, Lindau, Germany
June 30 – July 3, 2016



A Joyous Cosmology

3-day Advanced Open Path Retreat
Whidbey Island, Washington
January 22 – 24, 2016