



Fresh Rain

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

SUMMER 2014

IN THIS ISSUE: Sufi Inayat Khan on Friendship, reflections and poems by Pir Elias, Kunderke and Karim Norerraz, Daniel Adamson, Amina Katherine Bragg, Jeanne Rana, Angus Landman, and more...



Dear Friends known and unknown,

When production of the printed version of "The Window" ended, I yearned for it in the way one grieves for a friend who has died. I repeatedly remarked to Elias that after I completed my second Open Path training, reading "The Window" was the thread that connected me with the Sufi Way. So in the natural flow of life, the volunteer position to organize a publication to fill its place has fallen into my hands. A twenty-first century digital offering has the advantage of links to take us to flyers for events, or to a more extensive essay.

In this issue, we begin with a quote from Sufi Inayat Khan on friendship. Enjoy reflections and poems by Pir Elias, Kunderke and Karim Norerraz, Daniel Adamson, Amina Katherine Bragg, Jeanne Rana, and Angus Landman; biographical sketches of Angus Landman, Martine Jésus, and Amrita Skye Blaine.

The theme for the upcoming Fall equinox 2014 issue is **Walking the Path**, and for the 2014 Winter solstice issue, **Heart**. In the same way a pearl develops around a small irritant, a memory or essay can be ignited by a kernel; this gives writers a launching place.

Please send prose or poems—or theme suggestions—to freshrain@sufiway.org for our consideration.

With love,

Amrita

Editor, *Fresh Rain*



Contents

On Friendship..... p. 2
– Sufi Inayat-Khan

Beginnings..... p. 2
– Pir Elias

**Reminiscences of a
Journey in Iran**..... p. 3
– Kunderke Noverraz
– Karim Noverraz

The Same Sky..... p. 4
– Daniel Adamson

"Qasida"..... p. 6
– Jeanne Rana

"Nothing in Return"..... p. 6
– Angus Landman

"In Icalma"..... p. 7
– Amina Katherine Bragg

"Gifts"..... p. 7
– Lynn Raphael Reed

Meeting Each Other.... p. 8
– Amrita Skye Blaine
– Martine Jésus
– Angus Landman

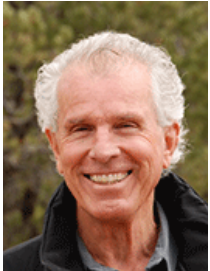
**Calendar
of Programs**..... p. 9





On Friendship – SUFI INAYAT KHAN

The life that the Sufi ought to live may be explained in a few words. There are many things in the life of a Sufi, but the greatest is to have a tendency to friendship; this is expressed in the form of tolerance and forgiveness, in the form of service and trust. In whatever form he may express it, this is the central theme; the constant desire to prove one's love for humanity, to be friend of all.



Beginnings

– ELIAS AMIDON

I once asked Coleman Barks, the translator of Rumi's poetry, for a prayer to honor the beginning of the third millennium for our anthology *Prayers for a Thousand Years*. Could he offer something that would invoke the spirit of the millennial turn?

In response he wrote a poem about a little boy in a restaurant who, bored with the grown-ups' talk, stood on his chair, "holding the railing of the chairback as though to address a courtroom." The boy looked around and then declared in a loud voice, "*Nobody knows what's going to happen next.*"

Perhaps this is the thrill of beginnings: when we let ourselves not know what will happen next then anything can happen—the new might really be new, innocent of our previous behavior and conclusions; from this new beginning we might truly be happier, who knows? The possibility thrills us, and from sheer good-heartedness we wish it for everyone: *Have a good day! Good evening! Happy New Year!*

Imagine how often beginnings come—they are endless! We close our eyes each night and begin to sleep, not knowing what dreams will stir in us. We wake each morning to begin another unwritten day, not knowing what will happen. Not expecting things to be the way they were, we can be like artists at the moment brush touches canvas—completely given over. We are probably more pleasant to be with too, not finishing each other's sentences, just simply and intimately sharing the unforeseen present without preconceptions.

And what about this moment? Is it too a beginning, or is it what follows after? Is what follows after not also a beginning? The wet infant takes its first breath and a life begins; the priest says, "I now pronounce you husband and wife" and a marriage begins; a loved one dies and grieving begins. Each micro-slice of now permits the unknown to follow after. The great nouns: birth, marriage, death, are nothing other than verbs—they never really exist in themselves; they are melodies, unfixed, improvised.

We ask: can I fall through time like this, always a baby, always a man or woman surfing the curl of the wave, nothing preconceived? Can I risk it? Don't I need to, want to, plan ahead?

But planning too is a beginning, and surprise is available at every moment if we don't deny it. We make our grocery list, then banter with the grocer, making him smile. Not on the list! We follow a pattern for the dress we're sewing, scissors in hand turning curves just so, adjusting, adjusting, the living responsiveness that is the heart of work. This moment has never happened before!

If we think we know what will happen next, boredom drains the life from us. If we don't think we know, we join the all-pervasive, spontaneous light that illuminates everything from the inside out, this and each timeless instant.

What we call "plans" don't get in the way; they are part of the flooding light too; only when we wallpaper the world in front of us with our plans are we reduced to living inside that little room. And not only plans, but all self-talk, self-concern, self-positioning, too, wallpapering with our little privacies the light that comes from nowhere.

But the wallpaper is never impenetrable—with a sigh or a smile, we are out!

Even now, the never-ending dawn is circling the earth, refreshing our little planet without pause. It shows us how to begin.

Reminiscences of a Journey in Iran



The Magus' Road

— KUNDERKE NOVERRAZ

In the darkened room, the ney soared and the singer's voice trembled long notes as we sat in a circle together. She sang: *"As long as the wine and the tavern exist, Our heads will be dust on the Magus' road."* Suddenly pandemonium broke out around us. Weeping, wailing even screaming, bodies rocking, our Iranian friends gave voice to their pain and distress. My husband Karim and I were shocked. What on earth was going on? We had no idea!

A few days later it was explained to us that the "tavern" of the poem symbolizes a *khanegah*, a Sufi meeting house. And the tavern of these people, their *khanegah*, no longer existed as it had been closed down by the authorities two years previously.

This is an unfortunate situation which exists throughout present-day Iran. *Khanegahs* are being shut or watched, orders disbanded and dervishes threatened. In many towns, there is no longer any overt sign of Sufi activity, whilst in others, only those orders who are clearly observant of the orthodox Shia Islam rules are allowed to openly hold their meetings. But does this mean that Sufism is being crushed out of existence? Not at all! As one Iranian friend explained: "Sufism cannot be eradicated, it is too much part of the Persian soul." The tavern, and the spiritual wine that is imbibed there go back not just to the glorious age of Islamic Persian culture but to long before it. As the poem says so explicitly there is the Magus' road that stretches all the way to the Zoroastrian priests and the golden ages of pre-Islamic Persia. A road on which the "head" is, as the poem says, like "dust" and ecstasy and feelings of the heart prevail.

Modern Iranians still love to drink this spiritual wine in which deep emotion takes over from the rational head. Through the medium of poetry the ideals of poets such as Hafez, Rumi, Sa'adi, Attar, Omar Khayam, etc. are present and alive for every Iranian, even for those who adhere to orthodoxy. This is a land steeped in poetry. A nation,

where the man in the street will recite poetry at you—and possibly sing it—where every household possesses the *Diwan* of Hafez and where this *Diwan* is not just appreciated for its beautiful poetry, but also as an oracle to throw light on life's thorny issues. It's a land where people weep readily when they hear these poems recited or sung.

The singing of poetry was probably the most common spiritual practice that we came across. We heard it in every spiritual gathering connected to Sufism, but also at shrines and social gatherings, and even at physical fitness classes done to the beat of a drum. Each time, our Iranian friends showed that they were moved. Iranians love to weep, not always in the dramatic form described above, but more usually the weeping of a heart overflowing with emotion about Love and Beauty and Allah. Hafez' has written in another poem:

*A passionate note was put into Hafez on the day
of creation,*

In no cycle of history will you ever find him sober

*Hafez has always been drunk on the wine of
Pre-Eternity.*

This seemed to me a fitting description of many modern Iranians as well. And in my opinion, as long as people are weeping about Beauty and Love, the spirit of Persian Sufism lives on. I trust and pray that one day this spirit will find its unimpeded expression in Iranian society again.



Reminiscences of a Journey in Iran



Karim, I Love You

— KARIM NOVERRAZ

Kunderke and I sit in a circle with a group of mureeds in the meeting room of the Qadiri Khanegah. The gathering has been going on for several hours. Whilst talking, their leader, referred to as the Khalife, holds my hand. He caresses it with affection and shows the group that the veins on the back of my hand write the name of Allah. I am blessed, he says and he smiles warmly at me. Then he goes on discoursing in Farsi with my hand nested in his two hands on his lap.

I am not used to men so overtly expressing their affection to me. Notwithstanding my Egyptian ancestry, I was brought up in austere protestant Geneva where a handshake is the most ostensible sign of affection between men. In Iran, however, I am welcomed as a brother of the heart. I feel I am valued as a man with emotion.

Before traveling, I had read about Iranian etiquette. When a man greets a woman, there is no touching and even no eye contact. In contrast men among themselves have much physical contact: they shake hands firmly; they can hug three times alternating the shoulders; they can take one another's hands, bring it up to their lips and kiss it. They can also kiss on the cheeks, even in a first meeting. Physical contact among men is frequent and unrestrained, creating as well as expressing friendliness.

One evening, in the same Khanegah, we gather again. The Khalife asks me to come next to him; he takes my hand. My friend Rahmat comes to us and pulls a letter from his pocket which he begins to read. Rahmat and I met two years ago during a zikr in Konya where I was playing with the musicians. Our guide told me later that the letter gave the details of our encounter. It described how deeply

touched he'd been to see a westerner play their music and do the zikr with them. On seeing me again now, he wants to express his feeling and offers me a gift. Shaking with emotion, he takes the antique ring inherited from his family off his finger and gives it to the Khalife who solemnly puts it on my finger. I am too stunned to speak but tears flow. Rahmat hugs me and they all start singing.

More tears spill the next day as we are ready to leave. One of the singers stares deep into my eyes and offers me a bottle of perfume as goodbye present. Our car starts and the drummer I had been playing with runs after us and shouts "I love you, Karim." I look back. "I love you too, Navid."





The Same Sky: *On Animals and Awareness*

– DANIEL ADAMSON

Nada Hermitage, Colorado. From our cabins we converge on the meeting house, each following a sandy path between the grass and scrub of the high desert. In the library we sit together in a circle, our solitude suspended for an hour or so. The carpet and books wait in the quietness and the light. Finally someone speaks. A deer came, at dawn today. It drank. It lifted its head and looked at me. It was right there.

Why do we begin like this, with the animals? The significance we give to the deer, to the bird that walks across the sand outside the window, is it just sentimentality? Or could it be that in these encounters we sense an opening into the illuminated, impersonal stillness that brought us here in the first place?



PHOTO: CHRISTINA RUTZ

In the winter of 1963, Thomas Merton was watching from his hermitage in the Kentucky woods when a group of deer appeared among the trees. This is his diary entry for that day: "The thing that struck me most—when you look at them directly and in movement you see what the primitive cave painters saw. Something you never see in a photograph. It is most awe-inspiring, the 'muntu' or spirit is shown in the running of the deer. The deeriness that sums up everything and is sacred and marvelous. A contemplative intuition—yet this is perfectly ordinary, everyday seeing—what everybody ought to see all the time. The deer reveals something essential to me, not only in itself, but also in myself. Something beyond the trivialities of my everyday being, my individual existence. Something profound. The face of that which is in the deer is in myself."

Merton doesn't try to unwrap this mystery, fearing, perhaps, that it might disintegrate if exposed to the

light of analysis. But at the risk of breaking the spell, I'd like to venture a suggestion about the link between contemplative insight and animals.

The meeting with a wild animal has a precious, fleeting quality. It stands outside the texture of our everyday lives, snapping us sharply into the kind of sensory alertness from which we so easily lapse. This sharpening of perception allows us to really see the fineness of the markings on an animal's body, the muscles beneath the skin, the brightness of the eyes. But the quality that makes us catch our breath is completely invisible: the awareness of the animal.

In a novel about a man on solitary retreat in Italy, I came across an observation that hints at why this is so striking: "He raises his head slowly to the bird, now only three metres away, bobbing on the end of a log. A presence. An awareness like his own on the hillside." Like his own. That is what holds us, watching, fascinated—the sudden and certain intuition that awareness is not ours alone, that there is no point at which I can separate my own awareness from that of this creature.

I have no idea what this awareness is, or how it is related to the wet folds of my brain. But in the encounter with an animal, I sense a subtle but distinct change in its quality, like the first noticing of the afternoon's gentler light on the wall. Instead of feeling like a personal consciousness, centered on a spark of self and illuminating the world beyond, awareness begins to feel more like a shadowless light that has no source, that illuminates everything without discrimination, a sky that is there on both sides of my eyes, a spacious, utterly impersonal lit-up emptiness that allows everything to appear: grasses in their intricacy, the throbbing hum of the fridge, the sight of my own hands, the sunlight falling evenly across the land.

In chapter nine of Elias' book *The Open Path*, page 161, you'll find this line: "And you, there, in whose awareness the birds also startle, do we share the same sky?" The birds share it too.



Qasida

The harmonium deep old
and wise sends melody
through the darkened room.
One by one we join
singing ancient words.
The melody rich as
honey on apples
becomes moonlight
on desert sand.
Shadows of dunes
are the curves
of her body.

As our voices swell
I can't sing
no me left in me

only you
whose scent
of desert spices enfolds
unfolds then
disappears me.
Lost footprints
as night breezes
stir the sand.
I would follow you
were I still I.

– JEANNE RANA © 2001



Nothing in Return

I know You are here
Everywhere I look
Announces Your presence
Every knot of my prayer mat
Is independently joyous
The more I pay attention
And tend Emptiness
The more amazed am I
At all this
For which You ask
Nothing in return

– ANGUS LANDMAN



In Icalma

They have long black hair
in single braids
down their backs
I have flying red hair
that blows and tangles
while hitchhiking.

They stare at me, with my backpack
and open smile,
theirs, mine.

One asks me into her hut,
a lean-to where her seven children
sit around an indoor fire
and sip maté, shyly, with pine nuts.

The ceramic metal cup is chipped,
its shape dented.
The littlest son
is not only barefoot, but bare
on this cold Andean afternoon.

And they ask,
“Nana, where will you stay?”
I say my tent is my home.
“Where is
your mother,
your father,
your lineage?”

I am beginning to ask that,
in the way a twenty-year-old
undertakes beginnings.

“You can stay here!” she invites,
“sleep on the fleece with the young girls.
They will keep you warm;
your tent is too cold.
More skins.”

— AMINA KATHERINE BRAGG



Gifts

Inside pain there is tenderness.
Inside despair there is surrender.
Inside loss there is love.



Unwrap the gift.
Open the mystery.



Let every moment
have its
calling
day.

— LYNN RAPHAEL REED



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



Amrita Skye Blaine

I was raised in Cincinnati, Ohio, USA and fled the conservative feel of both the place and my family in 1965. Although loving and generous, my parents were atheists and allowed no space for a budding mystic.

In 1971, I landed in San Francisco, and took initiation in the Ruhaniat, our brother-sister Inayati order. As Ruhaniat secretary for twelve years, I tracked initiates, created publications, and welcomed newcomers. When the Federation of the Sufi Message was created, Murshid Nawab Parnak and I co-edited the journal, "Toward The One" through its ten year span. During that time, I unearthed a passion for writing. I'm putting finishing touches on a memoir about raising my disabled son, and have begun a novel.

I spoke privately with Pir Elias and Murshida Rabbia at Northwest Sufi Camp in 2007, and spilled the heart of my yearning: after decades, I had not slaked my inner thirst. Elias pointed me toward the Open Path. My husband, Boudewijn, and I participated in two trainings, and I took initiation in 2008.

Life is the same, yet wholly different. We are, as Elias said with a smile, "ruined." Each day, I awaken, grateful to be present, happy to serve.



Martine Jésus

My first encounter with the mystery of life happened in the fifties when, as a small child walking to the grocer's shop in the city of Blois, France, I suddenly realized that the moon was following me! This triggered a yearning to know the answer to all these questions: why is the sky blue rather than green, where do we come from, where do we go, who are we, and so on. I became a voracious reader, I was ready to study everything. I finally chose for a MSc in Physics—that would undoubtedly unveil to me the mysteries of the world—which of course it did not. With little appetite for patient work in a laboratory and a curiosity about life in the world, I started a business career with Colgate after a MBA at Insead. I have found it hard all along, although I certainly learned a lot about others and myself.

I had almost lost hope, when I finally "came home" quite by chance in my early forties. I was initiated in the Sufi Way twenty years ago by Murshida Sitara and it has been ever since an incredible journey on the Open Path, where "everything" finally comes together, where questions and answers do not matter any longer.



Angus Landman

At age thirteen, I was fascinated by the idea that it was impossible to prove anything. I learned endless psycho-spiritual Shakespeare quotes without knowing why. Decades later I began to understand.

A deep non-dual experience in India led me to train as a psychosynthesis psychotherapist. I practiced for fifteen years and subsequently set up therapy centers to support and promote the psychological and holistic health initiative.

Finding the Sufi Way (after a tip-off from a dodgy colleague) was like a homecoming. I had come across the Sufi tradition many times in my wide-ranging exploration, and had always found it appealing, but had no idea how to engage with it. The welcome I experienced was not one of a guest coming into another's place, but rather so seamless I never felt like a guest. I felt I have always belonged here.

I also enjoy writing poetry and the Open Path training has unleashed the muse ... the bearing witness to which my fellow trainees have had to endure.

Calendar of Programs



The Open Path of Nonduality

London, UK • Afternoon talk and evening musical meditation
Elias Amidon

June 28, 2014



The Open Path of Nonduality

Bristol, UK • Afternoon talk
Elias Amidon

June 29, 2014



The Mysticism of Music

Retreat in Amsterdam, Netherlands
Kunderke and Karim Noverraz

June 28–29, 2014



The Creative Path

Nada Hermitage, Crestone, CO
Puran Lucas Perez and Carol Barrow

September 4–10, 2014



Wilderness Quest

Canyonlands, Utah
Elias Amidon and Elizabeth Rabia Roberts

September 19-28, 2014



Open Path Intensive Retreat

Nada Hermitage, Crestone, CO
Elias Amidon

October 2–6, 2014



Living with Dying

Residential Workshop in Germany
Irène Kaigetsu Bakker Sensei

October 16–19, 2014



Toward the One

The Hague, Netherlands
Omar and Suzanne Inayat Khan

October 31–November 1, 2014



Pilgrimage to Konya

Encounter with the Living Sufism of Turkey
Kunderke and Karim Noverraz

December 6–19, 2014



Living Sufism

Year-Long Teleconference
Nine Senior Teachers of the Sufi Way

First and Third Sundays of each month



2015 9-Month Open Path Trainings

England, Germany, and the U.S.