



Fresh Rain

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

WINTER 2017

IN THIS ISSUE: *Looking for Sky* by Suzanne Inayat-Khan, *Deep Nobility* by Umtul Valeton-Kiekens, *Unbinding: on death and dying* by Yona Chavanne, and *Five Prayers* by Pir Elias

Dear Friends,



I realized about a month ago that the theme "Death and Dying" I had planned for this season is the same theme we addressed last winter solstice, so I opened to whatever articles came in, whether on that topic or a different one.

Yona Chavanne brings us a thoughtful essay called "Unbinding: on death and dying." Suzanne Inayat-Khan writes "Longing for Sky," the unfolding details of a dream she had. Umtul Valeton-Kiekens offers a close reading and interpretation of a Rumi poem, tying it to Sufi practice. This is a long article, but I simply couldn't cut it.

The poetry section belongs to Pir Elias this season. He gave himself a Chilla of writing a prayer every day for forty days. He provided five of them for this issue.

And Mèhèra Bakker gives us two quotes from Sufi Inayat Khan: one about the mystic's view on aristocracy and democracy, another on the art of personality.

The Spring issue's theme is "Free Medicine," and at Summer solstice we'll consider "Service."

I welcome your offerings, and encourage you to write for us—you are the very heart of Fresh Rain.

I hope your holidays are blessed, filled with kindness, and most of all: open, transparent, lucid, and awake!

with love to you all,
Amrita

editor, Fresh Rain: freshrain@sufiway.org



Contents

Looking for Sky..... p. 2
– Suzanne Inayat-Khan

Deep Nobility..... p. 3
– Umtul Valeton-Kiekens

*Unbinding:
on death and dying*..... p. 5
– Yona Chavanne

Five Prayers..... p. 6
– Pir Elias Amidon

*Upcoming
Programs*..... p. 9



Looking for Sky

by Suzanne Inayat-Khan

I know how it is to be above the clouds, in endless open sky. Horizons edge into deep blue, though actually, there is no color. What is visible is transparent, nothing interrupts. Silent Endless Presence is released in every sound. The Absolute, is welcoming, is including me. All that I am and All That Is breathe as one. I don't notice that I rest in easy open heartedness, but it is so. I look down and see continuous soft white cloud. I am above the roof of the world and yet I am home. A serene, joyful freedom is present; freedom from needing to be someone, or to do something, freedom from having to be somewhere. Everything perfect just as it is.

Awakened by turbulence, I see clouds fly past my window. I am in an airplane. Of course! I give a little laugh at my self-location, my recognition. I look down and see a vast expanse of water. Now land. All small and far away. Hills turn into mountains. White tops of snow. I marvel at nature. At the incredible vastness of it all. I become

aware of my intelligent consciousness witnessing, of the deep love I have for this world, this life. We fly over a townscape—paths and roofs and gardens and car parks and roads. Squares and circles and lines that criss-cross, some thin, some fat. I track the road out of town with my eyes, through fields, neatly ordered and bordered. Crops of different colors. We fly on, and the road opens into another town. I see how we humans create patterns and order; we busy ourselves with structures, creating neural pathways outside our heads. We are amazing. Rows of houses, each house with a different control hub, a different network. Some lights are on now. What are people doing? Eating, speaking, cooking, watching TV, praying, writing emails: busy. Being busy. Understanding, controlling, managing, breaking, fixing, forcing, developing, improving, teaching, parenting, relating. Making. Meaning. So many “ings” to do. I do that; sometimes life habits seem wearying. I think of something Murshid Fazal said: “We carry our coffins on



our back.” Yes, I get that. Why, when I know Being, do I do Doing? Maybe if I go back to sleep I can get back to sky.

My eyes open, I am in the luggage hall. My stomach is in a knot, I don't know why except it's locked up in being me. I know “Be here now” is the instruction. Don't try to change anything, just notice. I see I have many suitcases. I must pay attention. I mustn't leave anything behind. Gradually I collect them together, piled on my trolley and continue on to the exit. Nothing to declare. A customs man comes to me and points to a case. I undo the locks, nervously open it. Out fall all the times I thought I was doing the right thing but

later discovered, I really shouldn't have bothered. I felt embarrassed. I started to explain. But he wasn't listening. “Next case please.” I knew what was in that one: my anger and resentment; all of my spitting fury, the ugly face, the tight mouth. Before I could gather them up, the next case was opened, and the next, my baggage laid bare for all to see: rejection, vanity, grief, lack of love, shame—oh dear, the shame was the one that cracked me. Smaller

and smaller I became. I tried hiding in the self-pity bag but I was squashed, no respite. I felt the absoluteness of being of no real value. I couldn't even make meaning any more. All that remained was breath. Breathing in, breathing out, breathing in, breathing out: softer and softer it became, until silence. And then it asked me, who are you and I said, Hu. Angel wings gathered me.

I woke in my bed. It was all a dream! “Free Medicine” sits unopened on my bedside table—it arrived in the post yesterday. “Oracle, show me my medicine!” I open it to Page 12 and Elias' prayer, *Homage to the One*.

“To this transparent light, clearness itself, omnipresent as space ... To this infinite kindness that allows everything to appear, we bow down ... Caught here ... we look for love from each other, all the while we are made of love ... To which direction shall we bow ... if not to the bowing itself?”

I still have not read beyond this page. Hu.

Deep Nobility

by Umtul Valeton-Kiekens

As I walked in the forest this morning, there was this lovely soft wintry light, which put a golden glow on the treetops, and this reminded me again of a poem of Rumi. This poem keeps calling upon me as if it wants to speak to me: in my thoughts, in my dreams, as if it was calling me closer, and closer: "have a closer reading this time, dive into me and get to the depth of my meaning."

There are degrees of nearness. Simply by existing,
every creature lives near

the Creator, but there's a nobility deeper than just
being. The sun warms

generally the mountainside, but it illuminates the shaft
of a gold mine. The bush will

never know how the sun is with gold. There are dead
branches and live branches

full of sap. The sun brings flowers and fruit from one
and more withering to the

other. Don't be the kind of ecstatic who feels ashamed
when he or she comes

back to normal. Be a clear and rational lunatic whom
the most intelligent human

beings follow. Don't be a cat toying with a mouse. Go
after the love lion. You have

inflated yourself with imagination. Drink in rather the
soul of Khidr, who doesn't

flinch when it's time to die. All winter you carved
water jars out of ice.

How well will they hold the summer snowmelt?

(From Coleman Barks, *The Soul of Rumi*, page 184)

So let's have that dive together: the word noble has Arabic roots and means "high standard, heavenly." First of all, there is a sense that Rumi's poem says that one needs a deep nobility in order to experience this golden divine light, but how do we "get there"? The poem itself leads you as a true *muraqaba* (die before death) through the "stages" of self-denial, of *fana*. Let's see how he does that: the first line, for example, is stating that there is a nobility going further than just being close to the Creator, does he mean save in parental arms there? That seems too simple, what is meant by that nobility? He writes



about the sun warming the mountainside, okay... but he then arrives at the gold mine, there the sun *illuminates*, like on my treetops this morning.

The sun shines for everybody, but to the one with an open heart it illuminates. There is here a connotation with the word *shaft* too: a ray of the sun inspires as a flash of lightning. Ah, a stroke of enlightening: as to the one inspiring words are just inspiring words, that is fine, good enough; to another, however, it can bring a flash of inspiration, a transformational illumination. The mountain slope remains as it is but the goldmine glows with a starting fire. It is obvious to me, and that could be a third layer in just this one phrase: there is a question of reciprocity here too, one cannot change lead into gold, but when there is already gold in the open heart, there the flames can burst out. However the sun is generous, it is there for everyone and everybody and everything, there is just a difference in reaction and perception.

What about the bush? Ah the poor little bush will never know how the sun is with gold... or is there a little reference to Moses' bush on the mountain slope, when God spoke to him? There was fire in the bush for sure there, but here in Rumi's poem one branch is dead and another full of sap. One person listens and understands and gets inspired, the other's ears remain deaf. Is that not the case with the words of God? Moses could hear Him speak but the people down at the bottom of the slope could not and were busy creating a golden calf instead, gold for sure, but of a material kind. To the one, the inspiring rays of the sun open her or his heart even further, but to a closed heart the ray will wither and die. What always strikes me in the poetry of Rumi that he in fact is saying the same thing over and over again, but in a progressive range of ever stronger imagery, in order as

it were, to break you open, to get the truth down in your heart, with his beautiful, powerful lines.

Muraqaba

In our Sufi Way we use the word *muraqaba* as a reference to die before death. It originates however from an Arabic word meaning “to watch over,” “to take care of,” or “to keep an eye,” and is a Sufi word for meditation too. It implies that with meditation, a person watches over or takes care of his spiritual heart and acquires knowledge about it, its surroundings, and its Creator (source Wikipedia). For the purpose of diving into our shaft of gold, however, it does not make any difference, because we are taking care of our spiritual heart anyway, without an open heart there is no reciprocity with the rays of the striking sun.



At some point in the poem we have felt the power of lighting and we have been burned by its strength, we have gone through *fana*, the phoenix arose, we then are coming back to our dualistic world and look around... and then it says: “Don’t be the kind of ecstatic who feels ashamed when he or she comes back to “normal.” There is a great sense of humor here, it makes me laugh every time I read this phrase—it is all so human—but let us be honest about the lunatic we are, who cares anyway, we all are sailing in the same boat.

“Be a clear and rational lunatic,” could it be he refers to himself here? That would have been kind of prophetic, because up to this very day 700 hundred years or so later, there are thousands of more or less intelligent human beings, still reading his poems and are enchanted by them. So let us dive in the depth of the gold mine and see what happens, either we are burned by inspiring words, or by inspiring flash of lightings or taken into *fana* spontaneously, anything and anyway is possible. This is perhaps the true meaning of deep nobility, because the

words have a reference to heaven (meaning your Natural State, God-consciousness, etc. rather than a “location”) as well, this complete surrender, into this intimate nearness to the Creator, Empty space, Light or however you want to name the unnameable, and we could live on blessed and inspired from within: *baqá*.

The poem goes on: “Don’t be a cat toying with a mouse: Go for the love lion.” I love that phrase, no half wheeling and dealing here, but go for it, dive with all your heart wide open into the gold mine and do not keep hanging out in your imagination or thought patterns, ego, dreams, resistances, to name a few barriers.

Life and death are, as it were, one continual swing between *fana* and *baqá*. Sufi Inayat Khan describes the soul as a current, as something that is not static, and she is not something one can possess. These swaying movements in Rumi’s poetry are like a game of presence and absence, of longing and love, of a deep silence, pregnant with life, of *Al-Hayy* (the everlasting life itself). It is like the perpetual swing: from the One toward the earth and from our earthly longing to Oneness, our longing a propelling force, which drives us (as a way of “speaking”) into the arms of the Beloved. The image of the ever-burning sun is frequently used in Rumi’s poetry; it may refer to the meaning of the name of his beloved Pir Shams of Tabriz.

The poem goes on and suddenly he calls upon Kidhr: “drink in his soul.” There you are on the edge between life and death—no messing about here—do not hang on to your dreams, here you are confronted with the guide of souls between worlds. He is a brave example; he does not flinch when it is time to die. Well, here it is clear that this poem is about life and death indeed. About how to live whole-heartedly and how to die fully aware of the love lion. In these few lines he leads us through sweet images and fierce lines through life and to the verge of death, he has led us through a true *muraqaba*.

There is however one more image: after all the burning images he has used before, there is this frozen water jar, carved out of ice, and how this melts in the summer warmth. What a beautiful image of our senseless activities, feelings of self-importance and monkey-mind-like thoughts, which lead us nowhere, but keep our false self-images alive and indeed lead us astray from this deep nobility. The door toward Oneness opens only when you are no longer there.

(This has been my personal interpretation of this poem of Rumi; there could be, of course, many more. – U.V-K.)

Unbinding: on death and dying

by Yona Chavanne

I have always experienced death as a radical dematerialization—a moment ago, he or she was still alive, now gone. Death remains a mysterious happening, a sudden shock, a non-return alteration, even though we are aware that a friend who just passed away was severely diseased, injured, or eventually, due to age, to depart. Death is a violent shock when terrorists kill people in office or public places, just because they happened to be there, or under bombs attacks, just because they happened to be living in a country at war.

On trying to focus further, I first encountered a wall of silence and emptiness. Was the fear of dying so strong that it obliterated all thinking, defied imagination, keeping me wordless? Was it a fear of the unknown—what may come after—or a stubborn ego trying to deny the impermanence of things? Is it a fear of losing boundaries, of disappearing into emptiness? Are we so identified with our body? Isn't death a counterpoint to life? In Sufism, there are practices meant for unbinding, helping us to "tame" the moment of our death. Can't we, like great mystics, cherish the moment where we shall return to nothingness, to the joy of Oneness?

As in natural preparation, each of us experiences impermanence—when realizing we shall never be children or young adults anymore, when a relation of love and

intimacy, a dear voice, a tender touch are gone. When summer is vanishing, temperature dropping, foliage's colors altering, outside becoming cold, chilly wind, and we are growing older; when we see injustice and coercion and feel powerless—for a while, even our sense of idealism maybe scattered.

We also experience moments of psychological death as a result of self-delusion, disappointment in discovering things are not the way we imagined or thought they ought to be, that we are not the person we wanted to be. Who are we?

However, each day, spontaneously, we let go of daylight and enter evening, a presence in us rejoices at dawn, rejoices at dusk, our aliveness celebrates being alive, celebrates the Giver of all! We wonder at the light of the sun, the moon, the ever-traveling distant stars (without realizing some of these celestial bodies are already dead, while their light is still reaching us.) Isn't that death in life? Isn't that a form of reminder and communion with the invisible light we are made of, with the shapeless unknown? Like these stars, the people we loved and who passed away—known or unknown, recently or long ago—are still present in us, reflecting their light, their living presence, their teachings, in our potential for evolution, in our "garden among the flames, between breastbone and innards..." our garden of unbinding, of transformation.



Five Prayers

by Pir Elias Amidon

Drunken Prayer

Today is not a day for business,
let's close the shop. No more
patient work and money worry, not today,
no more careful counting, not with you
spinning around in my heart like this.
I can't keep still. Listen!
The piano's playing all by itself!
The eggs are cooking themselves in the pan!
My holy books have jumped off their shelves,
they're flapping around the room,
pages falling everywhere. I'm happy
but don't let anyone see me like this
or the whole town will pick up its skirts and run away.
Beloved, when you kill me, I pray
I'll be just as sober as I am today.

Psalm

My heart is your sky, beloved,
there is nothing I need.
On the hills of your earth I walk upright
and in the fields of your love I find peace.
You have made my soul
a window and opened it to you.
You have taken away my fear.
You have given me to know
my home is your presence
and I will live
in the light of your joy forever.



The Nest of Nearness

An old friend of yours told me
that my heart is like a bird in the world of desire
flying in the air of seeking
until it lands in the nest of nearness to you.

I fold my wings. The nest is lined
with the soft down of silence, held
in the infinite tree of your presence.
I didn't know it would be like this.

Where I come from people are lonely.
They hurry past your beauty, fearing death.
I used to be like them, afraid of heights,
until you gave my heart these wings.

Now I don't ask to be comforted.
That would keep me scared and needy.
Now there is no edge to the peace
of my happiness and yours.

That Pouring

The tender one inside each one is you.
The quiet one inside each one is you.
The one I love inside each one is you.
Beloved, you pour into so many faces I forget
who I'm talking to. I want to be faithful
but you keep winking at me from all these eyes.

My heart has a confession: it's in love with the sky
and the great mountain there and the way they touch
each other here inside me. Sometimes they're so gentle
they hardly move, then soft rain runs down.
Sometimes lightning leaps up and a wild howling follows.

Beloved, you keep pouring this moment into the next
and you don't leave a clue how you do it.
I'm in love with that pouring.



How It Feels

I know you are curious, beloved.
I know you want to know how it feels
to sip this tea and to hear
those raindrops tapping on my window.

I know you want to know how it feels
to stand on two feet, to walk and stop,
to turn your attention,
how it feels to laugh in good company,
and to kneel beside the dead body of a friend.

You are curious, beloved, I know,
to feel how it feels to touch with your lips
breathing skin,
to land your tenderness on just one thing.

I know you want to know
what it's like to die, to fall
into yourself with a silent shout,
and what it's like to hold a pen
and search for words in the dark.

I know you want to know.
I'd give my life to tell you.



Upcoming Programs 2016 – 17



Living Sufism

The 2016 – 17 program is now underway. This year's presentations will be a collective inquiry into the central theme: *Practices of Awakening*. Please visit solaria.ws/LSR for more information.



Two-Week Open Path Retreat

Nada Hermitage,
Crestone, Colorado
Elias Amidon
May 4 – 18, 2017



Free Medicine Four-Day Retreat

Whidbey Institute,
Whidbey Island, Washington
Elias Amidon
February 9 – 12, 2017



Free Medicine Six-Day Retreat

Buckland Hall,
Wales, U.K.
Elias Amidon
June 25 – 30, 2017



Free Medicine Four-Day Retreat

Treasure Sands Club
Treasure Cay, Abaco, The Bahamas
Elias Amidon
March 2 – 5, 2017



Vision Quest

Twelve-day program in wild nature
Mallorca
Balearic Islands, Spain
July 12 – 24, 2017



Continuous Realization

Advanced Six-Month Retreat with Elias Amidon
Himmelreich Retreat Center, Germany
March 30 – April 2, 2017
October 12 – 15, 2017



Two-Week Open Path Retreat

Nada Hermitage,
Crestone, Colorado
Elias Amidon
November 2 – 16, 2017