



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

SPRING 2018

IN THIS ISSUE: Essays by Pir Elias, Chris Covey, Judy Ryde, Meg Rinaldi, and Amrita Skye Blaine; Poetry by Klaus-Peter Esser, Yona Chavanne, Simon Vivian, and Carol Barrow



Dear Friends,

Our theme for this Spring issue is "Friendship." In the essay section, Elias has written on "Befriending Unfriendliness" which seems to be required more of us now than ever. Chris Covey explores grief and the friendship of his childhood dog. In "Friendship," Judy Ryde probes friendship and intimacy. Meg Rinaldi writes from her NADA retreat, and I wrote on the qualities of friendship when I was a child, and the kinds of friendships I cherish now.

The poetry section includes an offering by Klaus-Peter Esser on the Friend; Yona Chavanne writes on befriending ourselves. Simon Vivian addresses The Friend Revealed, and Carol Barrow explores life's generosity.

Mèhèra Bakker gives us selections from Sufi Inayat Khan. Thank you, Mèhèra!

The theme for the summer issue is "Letting Go." That's our job, isn't it? I continue to encourage you to write—you are the very heart of Fresh Rain. Please share with us. I hope your spring is filled with blossoms and just enough rain, and the openings that new birth brings.

The fall theme will be "Slowing Down."

Thank you, Carol, for all your assistance gathering writing. I cherish the help you provide.

With love for each one of you,

Amrita

editor, Fresh Rain: freshrain@sufiway.org



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## Befriending Unfriendliness

by Pir Elias

While the world we encounter day-to-day is not always friendly, it is our job to befriend it. Of course, befriending the world's unfriendliness is a profound challenge; it requires equanimity and a great capacity for love and compassion. When Jesus was being nailed to the cross he prayed that his executioners be forgiven. Although we may honor his response as an ideal, when someone criticizes us or expresses animosity toward us, what is our response? Most often we react with defensiveness: we try either to defend ourselves or to return the attack in ways that will diminish the accuser. Yet we can see from the world's history of conflict, violence and revenge—the predictable outcomes of this kind of reactivity—just as the many small examples we can think of from our own lives show us the painful results of our own defensiveness.

Befriending unfriendliness is not something easy to accept, especially when we consider the horrendous examples of victimization and oppression throughout human history—befriending that unfriendliness can look like passivity, or foolhardiness, or even cowardice. As a conscientious objector during the Vietnam War, I grappled at length with the dilemma of pacifism—and it is far beyond the scope of this essay to deal with its many nuances—but most succinctly, for me it comes down to “situational ethics”: our job is to befriend the world, yes, but sometimes so many mistakes have been made, so many opportunities for befriending have been missed, that there is no alternative but to say *No!* and to stand up to oppression, as the Allies did when they stood up to the Nazi war machine in the Second World War. Befriending must be our natural response in nearly every situation we encounter, but when it is too late and the only recourse to prevent even greater disaster is through force, then the use of force may be justified.

But then what? This is the crucial point—there are endless possibilities for the healing power of friendship to avert violence and oppression before they have a chance to spread. For example, if something like the Marshall Plan had been initiated following the First World War, the Second World War might never have happened. As the lines I often repeat from Wallace Stevens tell us:

*After the final no there comes a yes,  
and on that yes the future world depends.*

And so it is in our personal lives. We can and must say *no* to abuse and meanness, and to our own unfriendliness toward ourselves, but even that *no* has its roots in our love for life and for the well-being of all. Our everyday work must be to water those roots. There are many ways we can do this, most of them quite small and intimate—practicing kindness, forbearance, patience—but the most profound way is by opening our hearts to the nature of Pure Presence (or whatever name we wish to call it).

This is the gift of the mystic path. In its essence it is not a complicated path, but it asks of us complete openness and release of self-concepts, opinions, and judgment. To the extent we can open our hearts to the nature of Pure Presence, we realize that its nature is love, a love that is light-years beyond what we usually consider that little word to signify. It is unconditional. It's the love that flames the stars and spins every atom. It's the gift of this beginningless, endless moment, the infinite generosity of now. When we recognize that this love is at the root of our own nature and the nature of all being—even though it is so often eclipsed by fear in the human realm—we open ourselves to the unshakable power of *befriending*.



NOTE: while there isn't space here to recount personal stories and examples illustrating the power (and challenge) of befriending unfriendliness, I have often told these kinds of stories. If you're interested, you can find some of them in the archive of [Notes from the Open Path](#)—in particular: *The Gift of the Flower*; *The Tears of the Bank Robber*; *A Prayer in the Militant Mosque*; and *Link Arms and Sing*.



## An Unexpected Reunion

By Chris Covey

I unearthed something recently that I had set aside years before, out of sight. Wrapped in layers of plastic bags for safekeeping, the memory of its contents immediately triggered a potent surge of grief as I held it in my hands. It was the cremated remains of my childhood dog, Charlie.

My rock for almost fourteen years, Charlie was the only piece of my life that seemed stable and reliable in the midst of adolescence, family upsets, moves between countries, and frequent changes of schools. I always knew I could count on him being there for me, wagging his tail to near-injury, equally thrilled to see me every time.

Then one September morning when I was 22, the very day I was returning home to Toronto from summer work in Denver, Charlie wandered out of the yard and into the street, where a car struck and killed him. I nearly collapsed at the news when I arrived. His sudden loss left me inconsolable. My entire world felt emptied out and bottomless. I have never wept as much before or after that day, for anything or anyone.

My mother spared me the heartbreaking task of claiming Charlie's ashes from Animal Control, and his remains stayed bundled up just as she had originally left them. For two decades I had carried them around with me, always intending to do something fitting, special—a ritual, a scattering in the mountains he so loved. Somehow between moves and life changes, Charlie's remains kept landing in dark storage spaces—not forgotten, but put aside.



On some level, I wanted to forget the deep pain of his loss. But holding what was left of him, I couldn't ignore the obvious. I had never really faced his death, or grieved him completely. I had never opened the bundle with his remains, or opened to the fullness of what he was to me.

So I finally opened. Between deep exhales and tears, one layer came away, then another, and soon to my surprise, I uncovered a beautiful little ceramic urn my mother had chosen. I've never been very close with her, but the sweetness of that small gesture for Charlie's memory melted a hardness in me. My hands were soon covered in ash and particles that had spilled out over the years and moves, an undeniable reminder that it was indeed him. Charlie was here, on my skin, but he was also gone.

When Shams disappeared suddenly under mysterious circumstances, a distraught Rumi mounted a desperate search for his beloved Friend. After years of seeking, and finding no trace of Shams, Rumi finally gave up: at last he understood his loss and longing. Shams had embodied the Friend so perfectly in the material world that Rumi had forgotten his deeper significance. Now absent beyond recall, Rumi could see without prejudice that Shams, the eternal Friend, could only ever be found within himself, forever and inseparably whole.

For so much of my life, Charlie had stood as my irreplaceable Friend in the material world, and he often visited my dreams over the years. Perhaps he was a miniature Shams to my inner Rumi, and not facing his absence, or his continuous presence within me, caused me to lose contact with the power of the Friend—that constant companion that can never be lost or departed.

The search for the Friend often leads us back to the treasure we have misplaced, buried, or put aside. There is no telling what shape it may take when the Friend resurfaces: human, mineral, vegetable, animal, or even ashes.

*He who realizes the relation of friendship between one soul and another — the tenderness, delicacy and sacredness of this relationship — he is living, and in this way he will one day communicate with God.*

— Sufi Inayat Khan

## Friendship

by Judy Ryde

As a psychotherapist I have many close, intimate relationships. You might say that is my stock in trade. But is it the same as friendship? I think I am often friendly to people I am not intimate with, like my hairdresser, for instance, who I am fond of and have known for years based on half an hour every other month. But is this the same as friendship? Is intimacy a criterion for me?

In preparation for writing this, I made a list of phrases and words that came to me when I thought about friendship: reciprocation, warmth, laughter, intimacy, resilience to challenging times, loving and trusting. My thought was that a friendly attitude, as opposed to friendship itself, can include all these characteristics except “reciprocation.” I don’t expect my clients to reciprocate—though they often do—but the power balance between us is uneven and their friendliness to me has all sorts of mixed emotions. It certainly requires resilience as either of us might fall into difficult feelings about the other, but it is my job to be thoughtful and non-reactive at these times and carry the client through the storms.

In friendship there might also be storms, but it is beholden on us both to weather them, as I have no more responsibility for them than my friend. An ability to be unreactive and keep the friendship on track might, at some point, be easier for one than the other but it does need an equality of responsibility taken over time. I regard my true friends to be those that I can rest upon in times of difficulty and who I am present for when times are difficult for them. We are able to talk through any issues that concern us seriously but also to laugh and have fun. People often say that, when a disaster happens in your life, you learn who your true friends are because they don’t desert you.

Having had these thoughts about friendship I feel dissatisfied. I feel I have divided the world into people I can have friendships with and those I can’t and can only, at best, offer friendliness. I wonder, can I live my life with an *intention* to be a true friend wherever I go and in whatever circumstances? My friendship could encompass the earth as a whole, embracing the entire ecosystem, the air, the minerals, the plants and the animals which includes all human animals whether they be my hairdresser, a client, someone I know well or, indeed, myself. Can I, like a true friend, be reciprocating, warm, laughing, intimate, resilient, loving and trusting to the ecosystem, to Gaia? This thought takes me past the duality of the difference between friendship and friendliness. We cannot deny that the earth is a true friend to us and meets all our needs, thus transcending petty semantic differences. She doesn’t desert us even though we sometimes forget our friendship with her.

I like the idea of friendship with the earth because the word friendship is, at the same time, ordinary and down to earth but also has layers and complexities of meaning. The charity Friends of the Earth was well named. Now that this has occurred it gives me a different attitude to times when I am careless about my impact on the earth. I can think: “was that done in the spirit of friendship?” when I throw something away that I should have recycled. An appeal to friendship has a different feel to the superego-driven phrase—“you shouldn’t do that.” I am more likely to want to remain faithful to the spirit of friendship than be well-behaved. It points to a different way of being rather than suggesting a different way of behaving.

Was this in Rumi’s mind when he called Allah “the friend”? His relationship with Allah had all the hallmarks of friendship including reciprocation and intimacy. Maybe our friendship with the earth could recall the intimacy of Rumi’s friendship with Allah.



## Living Friendship: Nada Retreat November 2017

by Meg Rinaldi

Being in ancient presence of the Sangre de Cristo mountains and vast plains that open westward reminds me that our coming and going as humans is a bit part in the larger play of nature. Our lives flicker in and out like fireflies against the backdrop of geological time. Perhaps when we apprentice to sun, moon, stars, earth, wind, and rain, we remember what is essential.

It is in this crucible of sage bush, sand, and jagged rock that we are winnowed by mercy and compassion.

It is a courageous aspiration.

A wide open sky taunts us. Some afternoons are long—loneliness cuts deep: we might bend an ear close to the ground attuning to the song lines of the land. Or perhaps we are mocked by coyote's howl; an invitation into unknown terrain.

We do this in communal solitude—our hearts murmur in a single voice:

Do not pretend not to know that recognition is the first blush of a deeper love, as we gather like lost birds to share the same branch. Do not pretend that Zikr does not ripen us on one another's breath. Do not pretend the earth is not one family. Do not pretend we did not come to witness and be seen—by one another and the more-than-human. Do not pretend that we didn't gather for a short while to disappear into something unnameable—and reappear for the sake of all that is holy.

## Friendship, Old and Now

by Amrita Skye Blaine

It wasn't until I was introduced to the nondual teachings—and they had their way with me—that I developed a new understanding of friendship.

I grew up in a world filled with apparent separation. Girls in high school compared, judged, gossiped, and mocked. For many it was a painful time. The friends we held closest were those who agreed with us: we shopped at the same stores, wore the same Peter Pan collars and A-line skirts—even similar, acceptable colors—and concurred about who was popular and who was not. People who didn't see eye-to-eye weren't our friends. We didn't tolerate difference. There was no understanding that we are all one regardless of our seeming diversity.

Now, I'm not seeking agreement. I want a different kind of friendship, people who—with love—reflect the truth, and appreciate my doing the same for them. My husband and I play in this way—gentle wakeup reminders. This may mean he reflects blind spots, pointing out where I've taken up identity again, that agonizing sense of me. How best to do this? Often, by asking a simple question, he allows me to notice where I've gotten caught. Then I don't feel blindsided, but rather encouraged and reminded that I can find my way back to the undivided. It's a kinder way.

I'm drawn to you, my spiritual family, for that same reason—you help me stay awake. Thank you.



## He Is There

I sleep—he is there  
I wake up—he is there  
I walk—he is there  
I dream—he is there  
I cry—he is there  
I pray—he is there  
I suffer—he is there  
I play—he is there  
I rest—he is there

I get lost,  
ah—there he is, my friend, this one friend!

—Klaus-Peter Esser



*The one who knows the path of friendship, the one who knows what real friendship means, need not be told what sacrifice means. He knows it, for friendship does not mean a good time, a pastime. Friendship means sacrifice, and when once by friendship sacrifice is learned, then one begins to know what sacrifice is necessary in the path of spiritual attainment.*

— Sufi Inayat Khan

### **Befriend Yourself!**

Wake up gently.

Greet the sun rising from the East.

Welcome the day's young light, pink and blue, or golden, or sky grey.

Look outside. Greet and bless the trees.

Take a shower. Feel the water running gently over your body,

Thank the water.

Enjoy your first sip of tea.

Don't think much.

Sit and do nothing for a while.

Wonder!

Feel silence enveloping you. Sense the presence.

Enjoy what you don't know.

Let it be, spontaneously deprived of conventions

Allow hours to pass by, in their simple flow.

—Yona Chavanne



### The Friend Revealed

the warm heart  
its eye searching reaches out

a friend  
the face of god divine

no explanation can message  
the immanent  
the kindness of the universe  
naturally arising

patience in revelation  
from experience arrives  
life  
yearning in beauty  
a stranger to no one  
the friend revealed

then gone with just a trace  
written in my heart  
burst asunder

—Simon Vivian

*A person begins his spiritual  
accomplishment by learning how to  
be a friend.*

— Sufi Inayat Khan



### This Taste of Soup

This taste of soup,  
the sun's warmth poured  
through a window,  
your face before me,  
last night's sleep,  
a drink of water from  
summer's snowmelt,  
gravity holding us in its arms,  
memories—both sweet and painful—  
air given freely  
to every living thing.  
I could go on and on.  
Life's generosity is a friendship  
we are never without.

—Carol Barrow

*The same bridge which connects two  
souls in the world, when stretched  
becomes the path to God.*

— Sufi Inayat Khan



## 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](mailto:freshrain@sufiway.org)*



### **Meg Rinaldi**

What would Meg Rinaldi say about herself? She's a lover. A lover of life in all it's chaotic, crazy, glory. She's known to go where angels fear to tread just to shake things up. She's fiercely independent, intuitive, outspoken,

and too smart for her own good. She was born with no sense that anything needed to mediate her relationship with the divine. She met Elias sometime in 2015, asked for initiation and never looked back. She is a writer, poet, musician, traveler, body centered therapist, who loves earthy jokes, zikr, dance, deep conversations, pinot noir, the high desert, nature spirits, birdsong, and the sweetness of early mornings.



## Upcoming Programs 2018



### Love and Despair in a Dangerous Time

Evening talk  
with Pir Elias Amidon  
Bristol, UK  
**Friday, 13 April, 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**



### The Nondual Heart of Sufism

One-day workshop  
with Pir Elias Amidon  
Bristol, UK  
**Saturday, 14 April, 2018**



### 10-Day Intensive Open Path Retreat

with Pir Elias  
Nada Hermitage  
Crestone, Colorado, USA  
**May 10 – 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  
Universeel Murad Hasil, Katwijk, The Netherlands  
**June 20 – 24, 2018**

