



Fresh Rain

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

SUMMER 2020

IN THIS ISSUE: Essays by Pir Elias, Klaus-Peter Esser, Kiran Rana, and Viv Quillin; Poetry by Leslie Gabriel Mezei, Jeanne Rana, Sharif Peter Hawkins, and Sabah Raphael Reed



Dear Friends,

In this issue, we consider “What Really Matters?” In these times, faced with climate change, rising fascism, racism, and the Covid-19 pandemic, this feels like an important question for us to hold, ponder, and write about. For me, in the midst of this wider stress, it’s helpful and calming to focus on what really matters.

The prose contributions are from Pir Elias, Klaus-Peter Esser, Kiran Rana, and Viv Quillin. The poets are Gabriel Leslie Mezei, Jeanne Rana, Sabah Raphael Reed, and Sharif Peter Hawkins.

For Fall, let’s consider the theme of **Living in Unpredictable Times**, and for Winter, **Doing the Beautiful**.

Thanks to all who write for Fresh Rain. Please (strongly) consider doing so for future issues. We always wonder if we’ll have enough material. I look forward to reading your writing. It inspires me.

With love for each one of you,
Amrita

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Black Lives Matter

by Pir Elias

The great tragedy of that phrase is that it needs to be said. That we have to be told. That we're so afraid. That we ever thought we could own another human being. That we ever tried to defend our frightened little selves by demeaning the dignity of a black child, a black woman, a black man, and yes of course, any man, any woman, any child, whatever skin they have or language they speak or land they were born in, but in this furious time let's not let the ubiquity of our fear of others and the insidious systems we've set up to insure our position and power over others to dilute this clear shout: *Black lives matter*, *Black*, as if that word really described a *kind* of human being, while *Black* actually means David and Marge and Nelson and Harriet and Martin and Maya and John and Marian and Duke and Shirley and Amiri and Marcus and Fannie and Jesse and Toni and Malcom, human people, Black human people, dark Black, light Black, brown Black, tan Black, Black not a single color but a history of oppression and hurt, of resurgence and righteous anger crying out, shouting *Black is Powerful*, *Black is Beautiful*, *Black Lives Matter*. Why in God's Name do we have to be told that? Why don't we know?



Being Touched

by Klaus-Peter Esser

I visit my mother-in-law, who is living next door, on a daily basis to bring her food or something else or just to show up. At ninety-eight, she can't hear well, and having a conversation is almost impossible. So sometimes, rather than talking, I gently touch her shoulder or her head and



her reaction is always the same: she looks at me warmly with her open, almost-blue eyes, surrounded by a small, wrinkled face. She smiles and says, "I love you!" or "Thank you!"

She truly is a teacher for me and my wife. Patiently she sits in her chair watching the garden, the flowers, the birds ... every day, from moment to moment. Her heart is full of gratitude, her eyes full of love, and she enjoys each moment of her life.

Somehow, we are all touched. I touch her physically, she touches me with her loving reaction, my wife and I are touched by the example she is giving us every day: What matters in her life is so little if you start to compare and so much if you just take it as it is—Presence, Peace, Friendliness.... What matters more?

Everything Matters, Nothing Matters

by Kiran Rana

I am almost immediately taken to Myrshid Fazal's phrase, "Everything matters / Nothing matters." And to Sufi Inayat's precursor framing of what I take to be a similar idea, he spoke of Interest and Indifference. (If you disagree or have other thoughts about whether they are linked or parallel lines of inquiry, please tell me, it would be cool to have a discussion about it.)

So, going to Inayat's line first, Interest and Indifference (and the importance and possibly the meaning of both) I want to suggest, keeping it brief, that Interest means caring. And Indifference means not taking it personally. What do you think?

I am pretty sure Inayat is talking about Indifference in the Hindi language sense of *Vairagya*, which also means detachment, as in not being attached to results, things, conditions, perhaps even people. And he calls it, I think, the core of an attitude of mastery ("Most attached is he, and yet detached; most interested, and yet indifferent.")

Mastery of what? Not of people, things, conditions, results, but of one's reactivity to them. A place, perhaps a sanctuary, an inner refuge of resilient calm, of equanimity. I think that this is not an attitude that can be assumed or

put on, like a mask or a costume; it is truly what Sufis call a *maqam*: a stable, realized inner settledness, much more important than psychic powers or insight brilliance though comparisons remain odious so forget I said that.

I think what Inayat meant by Interest is pretty much what Fazal meant by Everything Matters—that literally every single thing has the energy to affect us and should. Our aliveness is in responding to aliveness, every moment's touch is a gesture and a caress from the Divine. Whether it is a moment's celebration or an eternal global concern or blessing, we are created to sense, to quiver, to care. But the phrase Nothing Matters says a little more for me than Indifference. It includes the Nothing; it is a post-existential opening up of the possibility of caring for the Nothing, the Void. And there is also in there, I think, a deconstruction around the word "Matters." Something about materiality within itself and in relation to implied spirituality and whether such a thing as spirituality exists or is simply the nothingness of mattering.

I'll stop here but would love it if others would like to pursue this together.



What Do I Want To Nourish Now That Will Live In The Lives Of Our Descendants?

by Viv Quillin

When I first started having grandchildren twenty years ago, I was very keen to instill a strong moral code in them. I did this by trying to be fair between siblings and also squeezing in short homilies on the “right thing to do” in any situation we were in. It was a tense and anxious time for me, and probably them, trying to steer them into being “good people.”

Quickly it became obvious that fairness is often not possible due to circumstances. The children seemed happier when I acknowledged this, and so was I. The moralistic advice, as well as any other kind, was mostly ignored by them. It seems that they had to find things out in their own way. Looking back at my adult children, I now believe that they followed the path that they needed to follow, not the one that would have suited me if I'd been in their shoes. They've taught me so much. Probably the most important learning, after breaking my heart open, has been that I don't know what is best for them.

It's fascinating for me to ask the grandchildren, and any other young people that I get into conversation with, about themselves. Although it is terribly tempting, I try these days not to offer judgments or solutions to problems. Instead, I ask them open questions, hoping that this will strengthen their confidence in responding to life with whatever wisdom they can muster in any situation. This also means that I hear something new instead of my own opinion, which I know already. I imagine that some young people are not used to giving their opinions without one coming straight back. I hope that my approach will nurture their interest in kindly self-examination. When I can't resist offering an opinion, I try to speak my truth and not act as if I have personal ownership of “The Truth.”

The young people that I come across don't seem interested in how it was in “my day” and I'm not either. But if they ask about me, and sometimes even if they don't, I've decided not to say “I don't do anything much” because that isn't true. It feels quite brave to talk about



the small things I do, like having a cup of tea by the pond. I've been reporting on my physical and emotional challenges and delights too. This sharing of myself creates a warm, intimate connection for me when I speak honestly. I hope it offers younger people a picture of a kind of old age that is lived with vividness and love.

Reflecting on what I've written, I'm aware that my grandchildren have the luxury of parents and teachers who seem to give them good advice and suggestions. Phew, I don't have to fulfill their every need. It makes me realize how fortunate it is that we have different skills, talents, and communication styles so that, hopefully, the next generation can take from us whatever is helpful as they move into the future.

If what I've written so far has given the impression that I know what I'm doing and my communications with younger generations run smoothly, I'm sorry. It's not true. It's actually highlighting the places where I'm stuck and disappointed. At present I'm having stilted phone chats with a young relative who is clearly finding it boring and I've not been addressing that. Instead of plowing on, usually by trying, and failing, to be entertaining, I'm going to do some edge-walking and see if it's possible for us to find a way of enjoying our phone time.

Just now I have no idea if any of what I do is helpful to our lovely and sometimes awful young ones. It gives me pleasure to hope that it's useful. That might have to be enough.

Connections

New connections
 Ever more.
 Willing souls
 Everywhere.

Online meeting world,
 Zooming to chatrooms,
 Share equally,
 Singing faces.

Virus mandated
 Physical isolation.
 Spirit fueled
 Social connection.

Routines disrupted,
 Busy-work erased.
 Go inside,
 Connect with Self.

Seek the essence
 Deeper than ever.
 A new spurt
 In awareness.

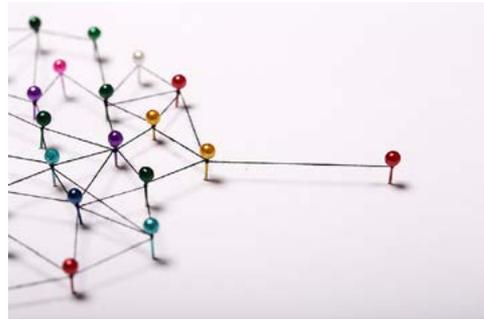
Play a musical instrument,
 Contemplate, meditate,
 Write, paint, play,
 Walk Spring steps.

Rethink our ways.
 Nothing impossible!
 Live for each other
 And our own self.

Physical distance
 Matters little,
 Immersing ourselves
 In new connections.

A caring world,
 The new normal,
 One human family.
 Real c-o-n-n-e-c-t-i-o-n-s.

— Leslie Gabriel Mezei



hunting for God

at the rim of the world
at the rim of night
or silence
or breath
the edge of breath
death

without the complications
of mind and feelings
a simple body
breathing
empty alive
heart beating
for once without
all the wanting
all the stories

a being like a cat
at the edge of tall grasses
hunting
for
God

— Jeanne Rana



“We are all walking each other home”

In memoriam of Baba Ram Dass 1931 -December 22nd 2019

Little did he know
as he asked her:
“Could I walk you home?”
Much later he would be supporting her last walk,
from the ambulance to the hospital bed,
then later still sitting in the large black hearse
on this her final journey.

Little did they know,
as they held their child’s hands
walking home from her first day at school
that this same child would hold their hands
as they lay frightened, of the walk home
from the school of life,
the walk the school had not prepared them for.

Little did she know,
as she wandered through the whispering woods,
who would die back first,
the trees or her,
into the wooden off-cuts,
then back to becoming,
part of the future forest floor.

Little did we know,
as we tried to save the gorillas and the polar bears,
that the forest, the fauna, and the fungi,
were trying to save us from self-destruction.
But eventually,
whatever we were trying heroically to do,
in humility, we realized,
we were all walking each other home.

January 15th 2020 New York

— Sharif Peter Hawkins



that secret other poetry

that secret other poetry
of crow and gull
of rhododendron
and sequoia

that secret other poetry
that we cannot write

the song of mountains
and water-rounded rocks
sands of deserts
voyages of icebergs

we are the ones
with speech
and tools for writing
we are the ones
who rush to tame the wilds

but we will never
write more than history

not the secret poetry
of the inner life
of stone or water
fire or cloud
though it moves in us
unsaid
unwritten

— Jeanne Rana
May 18, 2018



What Matters

The descent matters—
 staying present to dark,
 bringing all things back home.

Unraveling matters—
 stepping out of the way,
 undefending the heart.

Attunement matters—
 resonance of *This*,
 streaming through every cell.

Awakening matters—
 arriving each moment,
 each moment anew.

Love matters—
 everything blessed
 and anointed as You.

— Sabah Raphael Reed



What of This Time

What of this time shall we wish to retain?
 How to grow food from the smallest of seed
 How to hold stillness that meets every need
 How to dissolve in dark nights and blue skies
 How to surrender our hopes and our lies
 How to weave love through the ether in song
 How to stay separate but know all belong
 This is the blessing, the teaching, the prayer
 Everything present, everything bare



— Sabah Raphael Reed
 May 2020

The Covid Spring 2020

*"Do not be afraid; our fate
cannot be taken from us; it is a gift."*
It is often easier to give than receive.
Can we accept with an open heart
what fate lays at our feet.
When your cat brings you young dead birds
or a field mouse, still half alive.
When life brings you a surprise virus,
or fate takes you round a dark, unexpected corner.

The Covid Spring,
like Pushkin's Boldino autumn
is a time of renewal,
of going inside.
The great pause,
when planes no longer criss-cross our skies,
shops and bars are asleep,
and there is quiet.

In Delhi the mountains have reappeared
and in Venice the fish have returned.
Once again, I can hear the lark ascending,
breaking the clear air,
over our spring white hedgerows.

When the rivers dry up,
we must discover the hidden springs,
often buried beneath our busy-ness
or covered over with possessions.

We must dig them out,
renew their flow,
and feel the water course
through our veins
and refresh the land
as it awakens us
to new unseen connections.

— Peter Hawkins May 5th 2020

*Italic quote from Dante's inferno.
Thank you Pam Maclean for the reference to
Pushkin's Boldino Autumn*



Upcoming Programs 2020



Being Mortal

A Pilgrim's Guide to Aging and Dying

An Online Webinar/Retreat with

Pir Elias Amidon

OCTOBER, 2020

This is a preliminary announcement of a webinar/retreat that will be offered over five weekends in October, 2020. The program's focus will be on the inevitable pilgrimage we all will make (if we live long enough) into aging and dying, and on being with the aging and dying of our loved ones. As we explore the many territories along that pilgrimage — the arc of our lives, the loss of capacities, being with fear and pain, giving and receiving care, grieving, releasing attachments, coming to peace, and many others — we will dive deep into the sacred experience that the journey of aging and dying offers us.

The webinar will be held online for two hours each Saturday and Sunday on the first two weekends and the last two weekends of October. The middle weekend will be devoted to individual practice and contemplation, with no online sessions. On each Wednesday during the month there will be a one-hour online session with a small group, focusing on issues that have arisen during the weekend sessions.

More details and information on how to register will be announced by email and on the Sufi Way website in the coming weeks.

