



Fresh Rain

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

FALL 2016

IN THIS ISSUE: Reflections on “Polarity” by Sufi Inayat Khan, Southwest England Open Path Gathering, Pir Elias, and Emer O’Laoghaire; poems by Lysana Robinson and Amrita Skye Blaine



Dear Friends,

In this issue we explore “Polarity.” With the elections in the United States, Brexit in the British Isles, and many other startling and confusing happenings all over the world, separation—the apparent other—is up for many of us.

A group from the Southwest of England offers the thoughtful “Reflections on Polarity.” Elias shares a story from his young adulthood that changed the direction of his life; Emer O’Laoghaire wrote a short reflection while traveling high above the earth. Mèhèra Bakker provided the quotes from Sufi Inayat Khan. Thank you!

Lysana Robinson sent in the poem “Setting Sail” written three weeks before the Brexit vote that expresses her shock, and my poem, “What Is This?” explores how to hold the whole wild show.

And, death—always and ever with us: Elias wrote an “In Memoriam,” for Pir Hidayat Inayat-Khan.

The Winter issue theme is “Death and Dying”—both metaphorical and actual. I have changed the theme for the Spring issue to “Free Medicine” (as I now hold a copy of Elias’s just published book!)

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



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IN MEMORIAM

On September 12, 2016, at the age of 99, **Murshid Hidayat Inayat-Khan** passed away. Murshid Hidayat was the last surviving child of Sufi Inayat-Khan, and the father of Murshid Fazal Inayat-Khan, founder of the Sufi Way.

For many years Murshid Hidayat served as Pir-o-Murshid of the inner school of the Sufi Movement, the tariqah from which the Sufi Way emerged. An accomplished musician and composer, Murshid Hidayat traveled and taught extensively, and was well beloved by his many students. May his journey towards the One be completed in divine joy!

Sufism in Daily Life: An Art of Living

— SUFI INAYAT KHAN



Man is not only scared of badness but also of goodness; man not only dreads war but also peace; he is not only tired of enmity but also of friendship; he not only suspects his adversary but even his own brother. It seems as if the mind of the world is not only tired of ill; as if humanity has had a nervous breakdown.

Individually or collectively man does not know life's purpose or goal. The Sufi message warns humanity to get to know life better and to achieve freedom in life; it warns him or her before every action to note its consequence by studying the situation, his own attitude and the method one should adopt.

Man may be taught to do good, he may learn righteousness, but this is virtue forced upon him as the result of a certain teaching; real virtue comes by understanding the oneness of life, thus binding man to friend and enemy alike.

"What the world needs is the mystical outlook"

Reflections on Polarity

Southwest England Open Path Gathering

Look around. All life is differentiated. The Oneness of Being manifests as difference: the sky, the stars, the sun and moon; this person, that creed; that hatred, this love. Only by honoring such duality, and the relational nature of existence, can we touch, even fleetingly, a state of unity.

There is a pair of opposites in all things, and in each there exists the spirit of the opposite: in man the quality of woman, in woman the spirit of man, in the sun the form of the moon, in the moon the light of the sun. The closer one approaches reality, the nearer one arrives at unity. (Sufi Inayat Khan)

Taoism offers us a beautiful symbol of such unity—harmony arising where yin and yang energies are in profound, relational balance: feminine and masculine; dark and light; earth and heaven; mystery and manifestation.

Yet, everywhere we look, we see wounds of imbalance. In particular, we see increasingly out-of-control expressions of yang energies devastating our human and more-than-human world. As with magnetic fields, whilst opposites attract, like repels like with polarizing force. Where bonds of relational respect with yin energies have been severed, distorted yang energies spiral off into

ideologies intolerant of difference, illusions of separation and superiority, delusions of control and certainty, emotions of antagonism and hatred, actions of violence and violation. We *all* suffer.

Each day brings more examples of polarization into sharp relief: white policemen shooting black men shooting white (and black) policemen in return; wars on "terror" that reproduce further terror; nationalist retraction behind borders, breaking international bonds of solidarity, turning away those seeking sanctuary.

Here in Britain we have experienced a recent shock to the system of this kind. The referendum—in which 52% voted for Britain to leave the European Union and 48% voted to



remain—has induced powerful manifestations of splitting. A five-fold increase in reported race-hate attacks is just one expression of the othering that follows.

As travellers on the Open Path, how have we found ourselves responding to this charged situation? How might we best respond as the consequences unfold?

Immediately after the referendum we noticed powerful emotions arising. We shared feelings of: shock, disbelief, denial, disgust, despair, anxiety, fear, anger, outrage, loss, grief, vulnerability, uncertainty, threat, confusion, being out of control, things falling apart, wanting to move away, to not get involved, to protect oneself.

And then,

In the almost silence of the morning after,
Birdsong and sweet summer sunlight,
Tenderness and kindness also took a deep breath in,
Shook out their seeds of doubt and hope on fresh and fertile ground.

....

We talked to one another, everywhere, for days on end.
That can't be bad as a beginning, as an opening.

As we talked, we noticed more nuanced and hopeful responses arising, including:

- connectedness with the wider world and a sobering realization of how privileged, and protected our lives have been and still are;
- growing insight into the experiences of those who feel angry, marginalized and dispossessed, no matter how uncomfortable that may make us feel;
- feeling energized as old ways are swept aside—embracing the opportunity to create a new way of living, of being with others, of being with ourselves, of being in and of the world.

The shock of the referendum has since been compounded by acts of violence and terror across Europe and we have turned to Pir Elias's teachings on nurturing capacities of *steadiness, fearlessness, kindness* and *presence*—adding the capacities of *unconditional love* and *connection*. Staying attuned to such intentions we have found ourselves embracing life as a living zikr. We feel our hearts open as we nurture bonds of relational respect through *remembering*:

- to relax oppositional thinking, seeing some things as “good” and the opposite as “bad”, since

*Good and bad are in my heart,
But I cannot tell to you—*

*—For they never are apart—
Which is stronger of the two.
(James Stephens)*

- to remain conscious of what we value, but understand that others hold different things dear and that didactic points of view only keep us separate.
- to listen to each other with respect without positioning and to keep dialoguing not just with like-minded people but also with those who see things differently.
- to keep talking to strangers, smiling at faces, being open and welcoming and to act more from love and less from fear; to see ourselves in each other, recognising *when two people relate to each other authentically and humanly, God is the electricity that surges between them.... All real living is meeting.* (Martin Buber)
- to notice our own tendencies when feeling threatened or vulnerable to split into right and wrong, good



and bad, blame and judge; to acknowledge our own emotions, including anger, and gently hold those emotions with spaciousness and compassion; to do the inner work necessary not to add to violence in the world, recognizing that *knowing your own darknesses is the best method for dealing with the darkness of other people.* (Carl Jung)

- to give time to pause, listen, open, as well as to engage and be active; to offer healing into the world and do daily practices that restore balance and tune the heart; to choose to live with and to nourish hope; to remember to smile, to laugh, to sing, to play, to give thanks, to show up, to stay informed, to volunteer, to demonstrate, to petition.
- to amplify beauty, connecting with the more-than-human world; to cultivate flowers and notice the horse chestnut trees outside the window, the light dancing through their leaves.

- to realize that everything changes—sometimes with the intensity of high tide, sometimes with the gentle swish of low tide; to know we are in high tide season right now, and all we can do is surrender to the flow.
- to respect the teachings of Gaia that everything breaks open and falls into the dark where deep fecundity stirs; to honor Kali, the destroyer and creator, who dances in the midst of chaos; to welcome dis-order for it opens us to fresh rain; to understand that both be-coming and be-going co-exist, and out of their dynamic interplay something magical, something as yet un-born, constantly arises.

If Yes and No stand,
 In all their oppositional intensity,
 Stand facing Gaia,
 In her many and great beauties,
 Stand at the Tree of Life,
 How long will they remain there,
 Shuffling and muttering,
 Plotting and arguing?

Before the gradual dawn,
 A lightening, a breeze, a smile,
 A breath awakening—
 Small shifts at first,

A mysterious, necessary, cooperation.

As the author Arundhati Roy reminds us: *Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.*

So, listen. Listen to the breath, the pulse, the beat of the heart, the divine dance between opposites that generates all life. Out of such mutuality and co-creation, where yin and yang elements dance in relational harmony, healing may arise. For even as things fall apart, the scintillating and still point of unity at the heart of existence—the Oneness of Being—always and forever remains.

This article has been co-written by friends living in the southwest of England: Suzanne Cowderoy, Tony Donaghy, Clare Lester, Sabah Raphael Reed (editor), Lysana Robinson, Kalandar Warren, Amin Witt, Erica Witt.



Revolution and Polarity

— PIR ELIAS AMIDON

The idea of a “revolution,” whether outer or inner, can be stirring, even romantic, but it has a shadow side. Revolutions typically get their energy from polarization, from being *against* something. In the sixties when my confederates called the police “pigs” it may have roused their courage, but it didn’t change anything for the better; it just made the police mad. We needed schooling in the aikido of non-violence. We didn’t realize that our “against-ness” was working to keep us in the trance of conflict rather than liberating the situation.

I received my first lesson in this dynamic in my early twenties while staying overnight at a youth hostel in Heidelberg. I was walking back to my hostel through the dark streets when, a few steps in front of me, a door opened and a man, obviously drunk, staggered onto the sidewalk.

I stepped around him and kept walking. I heard him shouting in German, and looked over my shoulder.

He was facing me, his arm raised in a fist, obviously angry. There was no one else on the street. I turned away and kept walking, but his shouts became louder.

I couldn’t help it — I felt anger roar up. What the hell? What right did he have to curse me? I turned to face him. My heart pounding, I thought, I can take this guy. My anger at his unjustified rage had taken over. I walked toward him in a menacing way. He was a mean-looking guy about twice my age. Still muttering, he straightened up and started walking slowly toward me.

Suddenly, the strangest thing happened. I felt myself being lifted up out of my body some distance above. I could see the whole scene: the guy walking slowly toward me, me walking toward him, the deserted street. And then I saw the ludicrousness of the situation. Here were two strangers about to fight. What nonsense! I saw in a flash that this was how wars begin: men take offense, for whatever reason, and those men take offense back. Then, just as abruptly, I was back in my body.

I stopped. He stopped. Then I smiled and walked toward him at a normal pace. He backed up and put up his fists, thinking I was coming in for the attack. I extended my right hand,

gesturing that I wanted to shake. He looked puzzled, glancing up and down from my smile to my outstretched hand.

Then his shoulders dropped and a cautious smile grew. He reached out his hand too. We shook, and then he pulled me to him, embracing me in a big hug, his beery breath against my ear. He was talking a stream of slurred German; I managed to say I was American. He laughed and shouted, "Amereecan!" We hugged again, laughing, both happy to feel the tension drain out of us. Then we backed away grinning, and walked in opposite directions, both of us repeatedly turning around to wave and shout, "Auf Weidersehn! Goodbye! Good luck!" Our laughter echoed down the street.

Those few moments, when I experienced myself looking down at that scene, changed my life. It began an inner revolution in my way of seeing and responding. It was a unique kind of revolution, not against anything, but a letting go of the knee-jerk logic of polarization and the conflict that emerges from it.

Polarization arises because of the dualism inherent in our experience. We presume there is a "self" in here, and a vast sea of "others" out there. Geopolitically, this gap

between self and other shows up as nationalism, patriotism, and fundamentalism; culturally it shows up as racism, sexism, and classism. As soon as we define the other as "other," our own identity gets a thicker shell.

This is old thinking, and though it still dominates global culture, I believe its hold is weakening. In part, my optimism is based on how prevalent "seeing things from more than one point of view" has become in the past few decades. Systems thinking, Theory U, complexity theory, deep ecology, nonviolent communication, cross-cultural communication, interfaith dialogue, family therapies — these and many other systems approaches to human problems are flourishing now in ways unimaginable fifty years ago. We are beginning to see how much the presumed gap between self and other, us and them, human and nature, has pervaded our societies and constricted our ability to get along with each other and support the community of life on earth. We are beginning to see that "self" and "other" exist together. Subject and object co-arise. There is no gap. My safety and fulfillment includes yours. The health of the planet is inseparable from our own health. We are one interdependent, seamless happening.

(Excerpted from Notes from the Open Path: "The Beautiful Revolution")



Polarity

— EMER O'LAOGHAIRE

Recently I flew from Greece to Ireland, the flight taking off as night settled on Athens. For next few hours I searched for a moment or place of division, the dividing line between night behind me and light before me, searching for the point where I could say "there it is dark, there is light." Looking one direction there was an illusion of darkness, in the other direction were blue greys and

the orange shades of a setting sun. There were patches of light in the dark, and dark clouds in the light. There was no definitive point where I crossed from one to the other.

From a distance we may not always see the light in the dark.

To view sections of our world as being opposite to us is, I feel, to undermine those individuals and organizations who have the courage to work for good while living under repressive regimes. They are the light in the darkness.



Setting Sail



As I set off on the long journey north
little did I dream of such changes.
Amidst idyllic scenery, surrounded by beauty
I lurched from one sense of profound shock to another
In my body each felt like news of death does.
Doors closed behind and opened in front of me.
An inner surety slowly poured into me
Like the incoming tide lapping into a rock pool.
All became clearer whilst remaining undefined.
Boarding the ferry, leaving the island behind,
I knew I could climb the mountains ahead
With trust in my back-pack and
My heart as my guide.

—Lysana Robinson July 19, 2016
*(From Brexit vote to new UK Prime Minister
and Cabinet in 3 weeks)*



What is this?

This outrageous, ever-unfolding display:
decapitations, orgasms, bombastic politicians,
premature babies born with everything wrong, struggling to breathe.
Grannies rock them back to life.

Two runners fall, one tears her knee.
The other, a competitor, eases her up—
forgoes the race, and trots beside the hobbling athlete.
They cross the finish line together, dead last.
Now friends for life.

Prior to this erupting chaos,
prior—but not in time—
is the ineffable:
empty of things,
but full of possibility.

Rest there—or better said,
rest *here*
in this ground of being
and, still resting,
join the show.

— Amrita Skye Blaine



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



Emer O'Laoghaire

Growing up I had a sense there was a dimension to life I was ignoring, and I managed to ignore this for decades! I married, raised a family, and worked in a variety of jobs usually office or food related.

While living in Australia in the '80s a neighbor introduced me to Vipassana meditation. For a time that was enough.

My contact with religious or spiritual groups and practices over the years left me with the feeling that although most had at their heart "know thyself, love thy

neighbor" they also had cultural or historical structures around them that did not appeal to me.

I returned to Ireland, worked in the film industry, divorced, moved to the countryside and started paying attention to the fact that I was not happy despite having much to be appreciative for. I joined a meditation group and over time accepted that my inner life needed to be acknowledged and nurtured.

About four years ago, I decided to look for a spiritual teacher or mentor. This led me to *The Open Path* written by Elias, and from there to the Sufi Way and then the Open Path training. A year on, and I have found a spiritual home.



Upcoming Programs 2016 – 17



Living Sufism

The 2016 – 17 program begins September 25. 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



A Joyous Cosmology

4-day Open Path Retreat
Sparjeburd Retreat Center, Netherlands
Elias Amidon
October 20 – 23, 2016



Free Medicine Six-Day Retreat

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



Free Medicine Four-Day Retreat

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



Two-Week Open Path Retreat

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