



# Fresh Rain

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

FALL 2021

**IN THIS ISSUE:** Prose by Carol Barrow, Anna Zweede, Viv Quillin, Sabah Raphael Reed, and Umtul Valeton-Kiekens; Poetry by Isha Francis, Lysana Robinson, Gabriel Leslie Mezei, and Jeanne Rana



Dear Friends,

This Fall's theme is **Unity in Diversity**. We received prose contributions from Umtul Valeton-Kiekens, Anna Zweede, Carol Barrow, Sabah Raphael Reed, and Viv Quillin. Poetry was offered by Gabriel Leslie Mezei, Lysana Robinson, Jeanne Rana, and Isha Francis. Enjoy the contributions! And special thanks to Mèhèra who provided Sufi Inayat Khan's writings.

For Winter, let's consider **Can we ever get back to normal?** Can we ever get back to anything or anywhere? Isha Francis suggested this timely theme—it's a question I've asked myself almost daily during the pandemic.

The beautiful illustrations were painted by Umtul Valeton-Kiekens.

Thanks to all who offer poems and essays for Fresh Rain. Please consider writing for future issues. It can be serious or light-hearted. This time, we have a couple of creative, fanciful prose pieces. I look forward to reading what you send; it's like opening digital presents!

With love for each one of you,

Amrita

editor, Fresh Rain: [freshrain@sufiway.org](mailto:freshrain@sufiway.org)



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## Gift from a Fox

by Carol Barrow

Dear Human,

It was your idea to quit the marriage, but you weren't thinking of all that it really meant—that you would have to face what you would rather avoid. Things like loneliness, broken appliances, and nobody to do for you the jobs that scare you.

I knew you needed to recognize the fear that tightened your open heart, so I offered myself up to you. I'd had a good life, given birth to a few pups who are out on their own now. It was my time to go.

When I ate my last supper in your backyard, you could barely look at the rabbit pieces I'd left behind. Fear blocked your ability to be present, to be open-hearted.

That night, I left this world. A freak accident. Or was it?

Before it was found, my body had been deteriorating for weeks. Finally, your neighbor saw part of me from her side of the fence... She walked around the corner to your house, rang your doorbell, and told you that you two had to do it now, before the trash truck came. Then she offered you a large trash bag.

YOU. DID. NOT. WANT. TO. DO. IT.

You could have called someone, passed the gruesome task to another. But you didn't. It was hard for you to see what you saw there on the fence, to see me like that. You could barely look. Once again, fear blocked your ability to be present, to stay open-hearted. But you dealt with the situation, and as easy as it was, it was hard.

My last gifts to you are the sensations that linger. The sight of me in your mind and the weight of my body in the trash bag. They will help you remember the pain that comes with the closing of one's heart. I know you don't want to feel that again. Next time, I will be with you, to give you strength. You will be able to replace fear with love, to honor life's realities, holy moments.

It was your idea to quit the marriage, but you weren't thinking of all that it really meant. Now you are learning to open to what you want to avoid—what you fear—and by opening, softening, and accepting, you can love more.

Love,

Fox

Dear Fox,

My heart is grateful for the gift you gave me. I do forget sometimes, but I also remember.

When I let fear tighten my heart, I am not present. I resist, judge, think I know how things should be....

When I remember, I am able to notice how painful it is to fear. I soften, and I can be present to that of which I'm fearful—of the changes occurring on our beautiful planet, of people who think differently from me, of death.... I am able to have curiosity about the Oneness that is showing up in stunning diversity. When I remember, I can love more.

Thank you, dear Fox.

Love,  
Carol



## Unity to Variety and Back Again

**Love brought us from the world of unity to that of variety, and the same force can take us back again to the world of unity from the world of variety.**

*Bowl of Saki, February 9, by Hazrat Inayat Khan*

Commentary by Hazrat Inayat Khan:

Sufis take the course of love and devotion to accomplish their highest aim, because it is love which has brought man from the world of unity to the world of variety, and the same force can take him back again to the world of unity from that of variety.

Love is the reduction of the universe to the single being, and the expansion of a single being, even to God.

—Balzac

Love is that state of mind in which the consciousness of the lover is merged in that of the object of his love; it produces in the lover all the attributes of humanity, such as resignation, renunciation, humility, kindness, contentment, patience, virtue, calmness, gentleness, charity, faithfulness, bravery, by which the devotee becomes harmonized with the Absolute. As one of God's beloved, a path is opened for his heavenly journey: at the end he arrives at oneness with God, and his whole individuality is dissolved in the ocean of eternal bliss where even the conception of God and man disappears.

from [https://wahiduddin.net/mv2/VV\\_1.htm](https://wahiduddin.net/mv2/VV_1.htm)

Seeing the nature and character of life, the Sufi says that it is not very important to distinguish between two opposites. What is most important is to recognize that One which is hiding behind it all. Naturally, after realizing life, the Sufi climbs the ladder which leads him to unity, to the idea of unity which comes through the synthesis of life, by seeing One in all things, in all beings. ... in whatever age the wise were born, they have always believed the same: that behind all is oneness, and in the understanding of that oneness is wisdom. A person who awakens to the spirit of unity, a person who sees the oneness behind all things—his point of view becomes different and his attitude therefore changes. He no longer says to his friend, "I love you because you are my friend"; he says, "I love you because you are my self."

from [https://wahiduddin.net/mv2/XIV/XIV\\_2\\_12.htm](https://wahiduddin.net/mv2/XIV/XIV_2_12.htm)



## Unity in Diversity

by Anna Zweede

*What a great theme! Each of these three words has their own precious density, and the phrase is both impactful and exciting. As you read this flash fiction piece, images may emerge. Let yourself picture the place, the people....*

A wind chime's song. Morning sunlight. Coffee. Stacked slices of buttered toast, cut diagonally.

This is our anchor and safe-haven, the hour or so when you've just gotten home from a night shift and I have to leave for work soon. We have plenty of other moments when we're together, colored in all the shades of marriage from mundane to passionate, but these are uniquely suffused with unflinching tenderness. No matter how rough a start I have or how awful it was in the ER for you, we sit in the sunroom of our home, and all is well.

Sometimes you tell me some of what went on at the hospital. When it's funny, or frustrating. If you don't say much and the crease between your eyebrows is deep, I know it was nasty and I know not to push. Other times I have news to share. A phone call or email from friends, maybe with an invitation we discuss. Photos I got from someone in my extended family who's traveling, or has a new baby to show off. Or I might ask what you think about my latest craft project. What color should I paint the dresser we found at an estate sale? Could the basket with its fraying edge become a hanging planter?

You start yawning around 7:40. The toast is gone and our mugs are empty. I take the plate and mugs to the kitchen so you can go straight to bed as soon as I've left. You smile at me when I come back into the room and we kiss. You might say I look pretty, that the top I'm wearing was a great choice. I invariably tell you what you can have for lunch if you wake up early and feel like eating, and what is off limits because I need it to make dinner. You are a chef's daughter, but I'm the one who cooks.

The van pulls up to the curb. I wave to let the driver know I'm coming, put my bag on my lap, bump my wheelchair over the doorsill and roll down the ramp. You walk out a little way and wait there until the van drives off, while I imagine I can still hear the silvery tones of the wind chime, clear and true.

*I hope you enjoyed the read and could see some of the story's elements in your mind's eye.*

*Now consider this: One story; as many various ways to imagine the house, the people who live there, the van, the food in the fridge, as there are readers. Unity in a shared story, diversity in where it takes us.*

*That last could be a metaphor for Life, don't you think?*



## Bees Are Not Always Busy

by Viv Quillin

The Bee was so damned tired.

It didn't even know how many miles it had flown because it didn't have a Fit Bit. But it felt as if there had been thousands, maybe even more.

"And what was it all for?" thought the Bee. Its aching battered wings were barely doing their job anymore as it wove unsteadily through the sky, landing heavily on a Foxglove. "Oooh Dahling, that tickles," the Foxglove squealed with pleasure as the Bee rummaged amongst her bells. "Done that one already," remembered Bee, sighing and reversing out of the last empty bell.

Bee sank to a soft Pincushion plant. "I can't keep going any longer," and fell fast asleep. Bee, who had no idea of the service she had done, that visiting the beautiful flowers is in fact a vital part of existence. Bee, who didn't know how beautiful *she* was. Or that her constant buzzing had brought pleasure and comfort to many ears.

In her dreams, a hundred flowers leaned over her and she saw their loveliness. She remembered the pleasure of visiting them, even through the cold and wet times.

As she slept, other bees flew overhead, their humming like a blessing. Bee's work had helped to raise them and now they were carrying on the job of making beauty.

"And so it goes," said an overly clever caterpillar, boldly striding up a broad blade of grass to get a better look at a passing bird.

*Don't forget to smell the roses*



Painting by Umtul Valeton-Kiekens

## To be *in* love

Sabah Raphael Reed

To love (v. transitive)

I love you  
I love spaghetti  
I love Sufi poetry  
I love the ocean and mountains and trees  
I love the way the rain runs down a window pane  
The list once formed turns out to be endless and constantly renewing.

Such expressions of love, whilst indicating affection and eliciting intimacy, at the same time encode a certain separation: I (subject) and you/spaghetti/Sufi poetry (object).

To be *in* love (v. copulative, n).

To be *in* love is a whole other experience. The phrase may be used almost dismissively about new star-struck lovers, "Ah, for now they are *in* love but that will pass!" —such cynicism perhaps concealing a deep yearning. If lucky, we know ourselves to be *in* love our entire lives.

To be *in* love requires no object and no subject. To be *in* love denotes a non-dual space of surrender.

To be *in* love is to be held in a boundless crucible, the infinite heart of the Beloved.

A few years ago, we held weekly Circle of the Heart meditations for healing and peace here in my home in Bristol. Over the dark months of the year, a small group of friends met together. I lit a candle and shared a poem; then everyone was invited to bring a being or situation into the care of the circle. This was done with words or silently by placing a rose quartz crystal into a bowl of water with essences for healing. For fifty minutes we undertook silent meditation, punctuated every 10 minutes with a light strike of the bowl and gentle guidance: first, to open our hearts to ourselves; then to each other, our friends and families; then to all humanity; then to all living beings; finally to the oneness of Being. The circle was closed with a blessing and the candle extinguished.

To begin with I experienced these meditations as a directional practice, with the intention to send love and healing out to each point of focus in turn. But quite quickly, as the practice deepened, it shifted to an alchemical non-directional surrendered experience, being held in a boundless crucible of love; being *in* love. The dark came forth to meet us; the flame burned brighter and brighter.



Inayat Khan wrote:

Love is fire when in the soul, it is a flame when the heart is kindled by it, and it is as smoke when it manifests through the body (*Vol 5, Love, Human and Divine*).

Together we lit a fire.

Now here's the thing. Beings brought into the space of the circle to be held *in* love included those we had existing caring relationships with as well as strangers we knew were fragile, vulnerable and suffering. But it also included tyrants, bigots, warmongers, destroyers of worlds, floods, cyclones, raging forest fires. Had we continued into the pandemic it would certainly have included both frontline medical staff and coronavirus itself.

Trebbe Johnson in her remarkable book *Radical Joy for Hard Times* notices how often we turn away from that which we find ugly. She makes a compelling case for forging love relationships with broken and despised people and places, otherwise they become outcast and "orphans from the cycle of life." Therapists working with murderers, rapists and other violent offenders sometimes coin the term "radical empathy" which denotes something similar—being willing to stay present with respect and compassion to those whose actions we deplore. Wendell Berry expresses this wisdom so beautifully in his poem "How to be a Poet":

There are no unsacred places;  
there are only sacred places  
and desecrated places.

Resacralising the desecrated is perhaps the most important work we can do.

As we struggle with knowing how to respond to the scale and pace of devastation unfolding across the world I wonder, is it possible to be *in* love with that which distresses and overwhelms us? Such a move invites an open heart, undefended to the 'necessary angel' of world worry that Pir Elias writes about (*Notes from the Open Path*, March 2020). It also amplifies the resonance of love as an essential homeopathic tincture, for "love can heal better than anything in the world" (Inayat Khan).

Over the final months of this year, I am committing myself to a daily practice of sitting *in* love with the Taliban. As a western woman in a relatively free and democratic country I acknowledge the immense privilege I have in being able to consider this. But I also notice that voicing these words induces an energetic shift. I feel less fear and more compassion. I also sense the release of something mysterious, somewhat like a sonic wave. In a quantum universe, perhaps such subtle activism may ripple through creation in ways we can hardly comprehend.

Inayat Khan writes:

The whole of creation is made for love.

May it be so.

## The Old Normal of Silence

by Umtul Valeton-Kiekens

I found it absolutely normal and delicious to be friends with silence. To walk through nature and hear rustling leaves emphasizing the sound of silence. This is not rational nor normal, of course, but this is how I experience it.

Silence could be such a strong presence; one could, as it were, hear creation becoming manifest. This too does not sound rational nor normal.

Is it normal to be in silence and feel this being unchanged and untouched by the minutes that pass by? Every moment a new normal and yet the same....

This ever unchangeability of silence is the very miracle of the universe and existence.

And yet, when there was a huge change in my life, when my love passed away, suddenly silence was not normal anymore, suddenly silence was not my friend. The silence felt empty and threatening.

I noticed going through a process of mourning meant that one of the tasks I was and still am facing, is to befriend silence once more.

Would that be the same silence as before?

I am happy to notice, most of the time, that silence now is not my enemy anymore. That it is back to the old normal to be in silence and it does not feel empty nor threatening anymore. Not saying that is true for all of the time. I am noticing too that although everything else around me is not back to the old normal, silence itself is back to her old normal. She has not changed a bit.



Painting by Umtul Valeton-Kiekens



Painting by Umtul Valeton-Kiekens

**Names**

When I speak with Crow as he hops back and forth  
loudly across the yard

When I gently thank Rose for the gifts of  
color and scent she offers me

When I greet Squirrel as he races, mouth full,  
across the eaves of the house

When I listen to Tree and Wind sharing stories of  
their comings and goings

When I watch Bee in Lavender, as he  
gently caresses each bloom

It is then, with their naming, that I remember

Crow Rose Squirrel Tree Wind Bee Lavender

And with remembrance the wonder of our  
oneness arises

—Isha Francis  
August 2021





## Dancing Wildflowers

The gentle breeze wafts through  
and conducts the music  
so the wildflowers can dance  
to the tunes from the sea.

Their stems sway and  
their heads bob about  
in a colourful crowd  
wearing delicate perfumes.

I delight in this vista,  
as do other wild creatures.  
There is nourishment and healing  
freely given to us all.

Gazing at this gentle scene  
I begin to wonder if  
all is as harmonious  
as distant appearances suggest.

Buttercup yellow dominates,  
tall Sorrel towers above all,  
Blue Germander Speedwell faces  
strain upward, seeking the light.

Realising my preference to support  
one particular flower over another,  
surely it is with hubris  
that I plan to interfere.

As custodian of this  
competitive dance floor,  
do I attempt to bring balance  
or defer to nature's infinite wisdom?

—Lysana Robinson  
Sunday 20th June 2021



**WE ARE ONE**  
**World Healing Meditation**

We are all one:  
 Children, adults,  
 Elderly, Disabled;  
 We are one.

Black, white,  
 Yellow, red,  
 All shades of color;  
 We are one.

In the East, the West,  
 The North, the South,  
 Above and Below;  
 We are one.

By the deep sea,  
 On fields and meadows,  
 In forests and deserts,  
 On high mountains,  
 In cities and villages;  
 We are one.

Farmer and fisher,  
 Miner, manufacturer,  
 Teacher, doctor,  
 Worker, unemployed;  
 We are one.

Hindu, Buddhist,  
 Jewish, Christian,  
 Muslim, Sufi, Bahá'í,  
 Native spiritualities,  
 All traditions and no tradition;  
 We are one.

Every one of us  
 Is part of the Universal Being.  
 One Spirit is in us all;  
 We are one.  
 We give thanks for all creation,  
 The miracle of Being,  
 The mystery of Unity;  
 For we are one.

We give thanks for our sacred heritage,  
 All over our Mother Earth,  
 All around this glorious globe;  
 For we are one

We pray for the healing  
 Of all of us:  
 Our human family;  
 For we are one.

We pray for the healing  
 Of all that live with us:  
 Animals, plants,  
 All seen and unseen beings;  
 For we are one.

We pray for the healing  
 Of our beautiful home:  
 Earth, water, fire, air,  
 The glory of all creation;  
 For we are one.

We pray that all may live in harmony,  
 Nurturing inter-dependence,  
 Co-creating our ongoing evolution;  
 For we are one.

We pray for peace  
 Within every one of us,  
 Peace, acceptance, respect;  
 For we are one.

We pray for peace within families,  
 Among friends and neighbors,  
 Colleagues and coworkers;  
 For we are one.

We pray for peace within countries and nations,  
 And between countries and nations;  
 Within and between all groups;  
 For we are one.

We pray for the healing power,  
 That is in every one of us.  
 May the Spirit move us,  
 To Unity in Diversity,  
 Love, Harmony and Beauty,  
 Eternal Joy and Peace;  
 For We Are All One.



—Gabriel Leslie Mezei  
 December 31, 1995

## Yin/Yang

Yin is earthy, moist.  
Yang is the sky god,  
all weather and braggadocio.  
She is passive, yielding.  
He is full of ideas, plans.  
She wants a nest.  
He wants a sports car.  
No wonder there is  
always trouble in paradise.

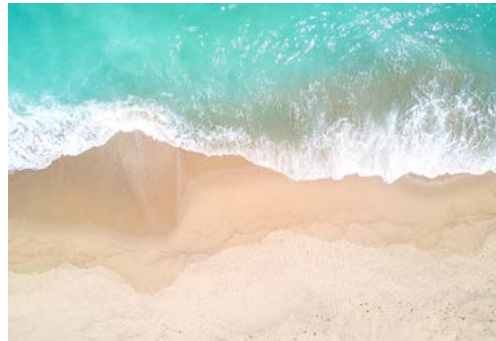
Trees are yin and yang,  
roots dark and passive,  
branches and leaves moving  
to the slightest breeze.

I am attempting to recognize unity  
beyond yin and yang.  
Everything is one, I mutter,  
caught in traffic  
or stumped by yet another laptop glitch.

Is artificial intelligence yin or yang,  
or perhaps unity, moving beyond  
the beauty and complications  
of earth and sky,  
blood and water.

And what do the grandmothers  
dancing at dawn  
at the edge of waking  
know that I don't?  
I am here right now  
breathing in peace  
breathing out pain  
as continuous as waves  
hitting the beach,  
no, wait!  
caressing the shore,  
water making love to land.

—Jeanne Rana  
Aug 18, 2017



## Upcoming Program



### Enter Into Silence

Walking retreat in the Moroccan desert

February 12–23, 2022

