



# Fresh Rain

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

**SPRING 2024**

**IN THIS ISSUE: Prose by Viv Quillin, Erica Witt, Basheera Kathleen Ritchie, Sabah Raphael Reed, and Celia Snow. Poetry by Ayaz Angus Landman, Jeanne Rana, and Amrita Skye Blaine.**



Dear Friends,

Our Spring theme is **Equality**. The lack of parity plays out in every arena of life, every place on earth—in families, job opportunities, where we live, wars, and how we speak to and treat one another, just to name a few.

Our theme for Summer 2024 will be **Sacred Places**. Think creatively—maybe yours is not a place at all, and yet it is the placeholder of the sacred for you. I'm curious and excited what this topic will ignite in you.

Thanks to all who offer their hearts through words in *Fresh Rain*. Consider writing for future issues, sharing your wisdom with our larger community. When your articles and poems flow into my email, it's like warm milk late at night when I can't sleep. Nourishment!

With love for each one of you,  
Amrita  
editor, *Fresh Rain*: freshrain@sufiway.org



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## Who Do I Think You Are?

by Viv Quillin

A good starting point is to ask yourself gently, "How do my prejudices serve me?"

After years of practice, which sometimes felt like eating glass, but is more accurately called eating humble pie, I've got quite good about stepping down from my personal pedestal, letting go of the training that I was somehow subtly superior due to my white skin, middle class background and slim, able body. The body deteriorated some years ago and I didn't even know that I'd felt proud of its abilities until I lost them.

The reward for this effort has been a deeper feeling of connection with those around me. I've become happier for that reason. After a conversation with my working-class neighbours yesterday, I was prompted to look harder at the other side of the coin: the walls we build when we believe ourselves to be inferior. My childhood left me entrenched with the belief that middle-class men are more intelligent and more important than me. They are not to be bothered with my trivial thoughts. This sits uncomfortably with the feminist that I discovered within myself as a young wife and mother. How sticky some irrational beliefs are!

The complexity of equality issues can keep my mind busily pondering and often tied up in knots. How can I reach past my conscious and subconscious bigoted beliefs so that I'm free to approach, and be approached by, people from all walks of life?

**Here are some tools that I constantly use. You may use something similar, if not, even though they may sound odd, do try them.**

On the street and listening to friends, I use these words to myself.

*"I know nothing about anyone or anything."*

*"We are all in this together."*

Responding to an aggressive communication, *"We are all just trying to be happy."*

Although it's sometimes uncomfortable to listen to a complaint about an inequality when it's not one that you suffer from, be prepared to say *"I'm sorry you've had to go through that"* and mean it. This can be incredibly moving for both parties.

From my own day-to-day experience, I want men to be willing to hear directly about the sexist hurts I sometimes receive. I don't want a response of uncomfortable guilt or defensiveness. I want the hurt acknowledged, heard with compassion and understood as far as possible.

Almost always when I call in the thought "I know nothing about anyone or anything," something shifts. There I am, on a walk down my local high street, and the sense of Oneness and love for the sacredness of everyone and everything fills me with wordless joy. Although I'm not aware of anything showing on my face, I find passers-by apparently sharing this and meeting my glance with radiant smiles.



## Equality Is A Finely Balanced Thing

by Erica Witt

EQUALITY is a finely balanced thing! A see-saw of hope and aspiration.

There are the fine words about equality: “Liberté ... Egalité ... Fraternité.” Such principles, I feel, operate mostly in the realms of the abstract and easily become abstruse. And then there are moments when we experience the power and the possibilities of equality, if that is the right word, and long for the shift of consciousness needed to make it an active force in our lives.

Equality ... the realisation that we are all one and all equal.

I experienced one of those moments when queuing up for my first COVID vaccination, four or so years ago. As I stepped forward, arm bared for the needle, I realised that I had chosen to do this, take this as yet unproven substance because it seemed the best chance of survival and the best way of showing solidarity with the majority of the population. Being elderly and frail and born in the West I had my moment sooner than some, and made a decision that was a bit like being blindfolded and led into the game of the unknown. I felt I was saying YES and casting my lot with the progress of humanity. A bit grandiose, but I expect I was nervous too!

It was an “AHA” moment when I felt one with all that lives. It stayed with me through the thick and the thin of the next few years. At that moment I experienced equality not as an abstract principle but a felt sense of connection.

Equality as a principle is still, for me, a bit far-fetched and unrealistic. We, the whole race of humans, and, taken further, all living beings, are so different in our looks, our appetites, our thinking and responding mechanisms and impulses. To me, equality is not about levelling out, but about connection. If I feel a connection with a person, a creature, a plant, then my curiosity is aroused, my sympathies engaged. If equality is about lessening aggression and flattening out the bumps, then I expect equality will stay in the world of abstraction for a long, long time yet. But if it is about sensing a worthwhile connection, then that is of value and benefit to me. It provides a direct route to the essential oneness of us all. That’s the shift of consciousness I strive for. That’s where I want to be. That’s the touchstone of the universe. The big AHA!

Meanwhile, equality remains a bit like sitting on a see-saw, balanced mid-air, a good few feet yet off the ground. How to balance the see-saw, hands and mind and being open and willing, surrendered, longing,

buffeted by the winds of time, the vagaries of mood, the violences of opposition and oppression, the swings of This against That?

There’s not one expressive sound or neat sentence. No definitive sign post. Just a collection of longings. A choir of Love and Harmony, an expression of Beauty, a college of seekers studying the “perennial philosophies” and “Wisdom Schools” through the ages, and assorted teachers, gurus, wise ones, and angels herding our better instincts towards an evolutionary necessity that is still mysterious and opaque and too full of words.

I polish my collection of AHA moments, watch out for signs and symbols, laugh and cry when the mood arises and attempt to dodge the cruel and indifferent circuitry of a failing brain. I pray for a collective burst of unity with the teachings of the wise ones and the intelligence of the angels that will carry us singing and dancing into an expanded consciousness and over an evolutionary threshold into a simpler, more compassionate consciousness for all of us earthling beings. Call it what you will!



painting by Umtul Valeton-Kiekens

## Equality

by Basheera Kathleen Ritchie

Among certain early Semitic tribes, the teaching emerged that humans were made in the image of God. By virtue of our physical resemblance, the scripture suggests, God endowed humans with dominion over all of the earth and “[every living thing that moves upon the earth](#)”—in this twist of prominence, Mother Nature was reduced to a servant’s role.

About two-and-a-half millennia later, at the time of the New World’s discovery, The Church sent its missionaries and conquerors forth, armed with [The Papal Bull of 1493](#) — the “God-given” right to seize and rule the land (in which “are found gold, spices, and very many other precious things of diverse kinds and qualities”) from non-Christians they might “discover.” With this edict, our old servant, Nature, could now be raped and plundered to remove everything of value, whether or not it was a “living thing that moves.”

These self-contrived declarations of superiority and dominion, one could argue, are what set the stage for the great unraveling we are presently experiencing.

Hindsight being 20/20, it now seems quite clear that Nature is a much cleverer manager of life on earth than humans have proven to be. If there is a “balance of Nature,” we, unlike other species, consistently upset it—extorting well beyond what She can replenish.

Her reciprocation becomes ever more furious. If we remain unable or unwilling to repair the havoc we have wrought, one might ask whether Nature would be better off without us—or certainly wouldn’t miss us. Yet in spite of all evidence to the contrary, we persistently and erroneously behave as if Her preservation is a choice we are free *not* to make.

In truth, Nature is revealing our position quite clearly. Our future as a species will utterly depend upon the strength of the respect we show Her. If we want to be embraced instead of banished by Her, it appears we’ll need to accept a much more modest role. Only the acknowledgment that we are merely a part of Her—entirely sustained by Her—will finally compel us to act according to the parallel principle that what is good for Nature must be good for us. Perhaps it is plain, then, that we cannot be rulers, nor even equals. Perhaps we can humbly recognize our actual role as servants in fulfillment of *Her* plan.

But serving Nature’s plan would require, it seems, a re-membering of Her ways that we have completely neglected to retain. How is it possible to recover such a thing? We might begin with an immersive study of our cohabitants—Nature’s other creations. How many



birds, for example, do we see and hear every day? Yet we never learn their language. What about the trees? To encounter the soul of a tree is to be forever changed—yet we barely take time to glance at them. Thankfully, while we lose ourselves in our own busy worlds, our cohabitants remain constant in their coherence to the exact letter of Her plan. For us to do the same—to know and carry out Nature’s plan—it would behoove us to learn Her language.

Any penetrating encounter or communion with other-than-human beings stimulates recognition of a liminal intelligence—one mind, one language, shared by all: the land, our dreams, the ancestors, myths. For now, we can only try to imagine, to remember, this new, old language beyond words, which bestows transmissions in subtler ways, engaging elements of our being we didn’t even know existed. Thus we discern Nature’s familiar omniscience, how everything is happening all at once, everywhere, in one all-encompassing, harmonious symphony.

Not least is the discovery that once absorbed in this exquisite, multi-dimensional oneness, measures of equality vanish!

## Stitching the fabric of equality

Sabah Raphael Reed

Unequal distribution of material resources and unfair access to essential requirements like safety, food, clean air and water, shelter, healthcare, or education are sustained by deeply defended political and economic systems built on separation, violence, exploitation, and oppression. In the face of such entrenched inequalities across the globe it's hard to hold onto a vision of life suffused with equality and social justice.

What does this mean for us who continue to believe a more beautiful world is possible? How might spirituality and social justice speak to each other in these troubled and troubling times?

Any commitment to equalities and social justice has to begin right where we are and manifest in all that we do, including our 'spiritual lives'. Equality is not just an end-state but also a relational field and social justice depends not just on who gets what (important though this is) but also on how participants in life (human and wider-than-human) relate to each other.

A commitment to equalities and social justice thereby has to be enacted. It only manifests as action. Of course being an activist is long associated with being committed to social justice. But I've come to see that what 'counts' as activism is diverse and multidimensional. It includes political and social action of many kinds including protesting, campaigning for policy changes, resisting oppressive practices, and making offerings to support those who are suffering. But it also includes more subtle forms of activism including writing and other forms of creative expression, embodied and healing practices, commitment to ceremony, meditation and prayer, attuning to the natural world as well as everyday acts of friendship and kindness.



Stitched fabric tunic, Yoruba people, West Africa

As Sufis we find ourselves in the fulcrum of wings that hold an undefended heart. With grace, we deepen our awareness of ultimate reality, pure presence, the oneness of Being that holds all existence as indivisible, equal, and holy. And at the same time we embrace the multiplicity and manifestation of all things in their diversity ~ seeing everything in its *uniqueness* as the finger-touch of the Beloved.

Honoring unity *and* difference, indivisibility and multiplicity brings into focus some of the relational threads that might help to stitch the fabric of equality.

Such threads include:

### ❖ Recognition and the *I-thou* encounter

Recognition invites us to see individuals and situations as they are, not as we would like them to be or imagine them to be. It requires us to stay present and non-reactive, decentered from our small egoic selves and willing to engage in interpersonal relationships that open us into the third space of between-ness. In the language of Martin Buber, the philosopher of radical dialogue, such *I-thou* encounters are when we become fully alive, able to see and appreciate the uniqueness and separateness of the other without obscuring the relatedness or common being-ness that is shared. This holds across the intersectional and fluid dimensions of ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, culture, and more, as well as across species boundaries.

### ❖ Mutuality and reciprocity

In surrendering to such *I-thou* encounters, the dance of mutuality and reciprocity sweeps us around the floor. We see ourselves in each other's eyes. We sense the enlargement of capacities that flows from our mutual connection. We feel the creative energy of reciprocal giving and receiving.

### ❖ Inclusivity and non-rejection

Committing to such a way of being is also challenging. We live in a world that operates through exclusion and rejection. Power, control, and inequality depend upon maintaining false separations and the practice of *othering*. Notice how the tendency to *other* shows up in us and that this tendency can apply in relation to situations close to home (including in relation to our inner personalities) as much as systemic discriminations such as racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, ageism, anti-semitism, Islamophobia, and more. Whose voices are not even heard? Whose experiences are marginalized? Who is it that we judge harshly and want to reject? How does that affect the situation when we relate to them through exclusion and rejection? Can we invite and open ourselves to an *I-thou* encounter with someone whose belief systems or actions we find abhorrent? Can meeting in such a way across the landscape of difference resource a kind of world healing? (continued)

### ❖ Respect and love

Acting from a place of inclusivity and non-rejection induces respect for everything that arises as manifestation of living presence. As Buber once said, "In spite of all similarities, every living situation has, like a newborn child, a new face that has never been before and will never come again. It demands of you a reaction that cannot be prepared beforehand. It demands nothing of what is past. It demands presence, responsibility; it

demands you." One might even say, it demands love.

All forms of activism rooted in spiritual awakening interweave inner and outer change, individual and communal manifestation, love and justice. "Love and justice are not two" writes Rev angel Kyodo Williams in *Radical Dharma* (2016). "Without inner change, there can be no outer change; without collective change, no change matters."

## Equality

by Celia Snow

The radio wakes me and yet another day of terrible, heart breaking 'news' starts to unfold; people are suffering so much whether it be Gaza, Ukraine, or refugees fleeing in dangerous circumstances, all thrust into my consciousness before I'm really awake. I turn over and switch off the radio; it's too much. I know it is important to bear witness to what is happening in our world but I feel more and more helpless and upset by it all.

Later, at breakfast, I read in the paper: "*The UK government can never accept that nature or Mother Earth has rights, a British government department has told the UN*". (The Guardian, 23.2.24). I throw the paper down and tell my husband that reading the paper is bad for my health.

Peering outside into the gloomy, rain-filled morning I am reminded of Aboriginal Academic Tyson Yunkaporta's statement:

*"I am greater than you: you are less than me  
This is the source of all human misery"*

In aboriginal culture, everything—from humans to animals, insects, plants, the land, and rocks have a spirit. I ponder what the world would look like if we stopped thinking of ourselves as the only sentient beings but on an equal footing with everything else. Robin Wall Kimmerer in her beautiful book *Braiding Sweetgrass* poetically says "*imagine if a developer, eyeing open land for a shopping mall, had to ask the goldenrod, the meadowlarks, and the monarch butterflies for permission to take their homeland*". Looking up from my computer I spot a pair of ravens under an apple tree, frequent visitors to our garden during the winter and I feel grateful for their presence. Do they have any less right to be there than I do?

Living in the countryside and next door to a farm I am very aware of the cycles of life, the seasons, the lunar phases and so on. When my husband was in hospital last year, originally for three days but ending up for six weeks, it was to nature that I turned. Every morning our dog and



I would go out for an early morning walk. It was spring and nature was at its best with cow parsley, buttercups, wild orchids. I'd take a photo and send it to him. Nature was my medicine and it brought me peace, solace, and gratitude. I began to feel that whatever the outcome it would be alright—nature called me out every day.

Robin Wall Kimmerer talks of *reciprocity*; the relationships between humans and the land based on mutual respect, care, and gratitude. She says "*Knowing that you love the earth changes you, activates you to defend and protect and celebrate. But when you feel that the earth loves you in return, that feeling transforms the relationship from a one-way street into a sacred bond*".

Supposing this sacred bond included everything? Supposing Mother Earth, humans, clouds, dogs, mud, nature, and everything else is respected for its diverse contribution, where nothing is deemed more or less valuable than anything else and where everything is given equal value within the whole. This, to my mind, is where equality truly lies.

Imagine what a beautiful world that could be!



### The Friend's Advice

I ask:  
 As civilisation teeters  
 in the smoke and tears  
 of yesterday's grievance,  
 what am I to do with my guilt?  
 "Don't have an opinion"  
 The Friend replies.  
 "Just take a moment,  
 not to secure  
 an outcome  
 but to become your own prayer"

— Ayaz Angus Landman

### One Morning

One morning  
 you will wake up  
 the sky will speak  
 and you will hear  
 for the first time  
 the message that is repeated  
 every day.

We bless you  
 you belong here  
 we love you  
 just the way you are.  
 You have become tired,  
 troubled.  
 Be assured  
 you are a part of all this beauty  
 all this pain.  
 You have been given  
 a heavy rock to carry.  
 Find a wheelbarrow.  
 Take the rock to water  
 and bathe it.  
 Love it as you would a child.  
 It is yours to carry  
 yours to bury  
 or leave by the shore.

Your pain is perfect and beautiful  
 but it is not you.  
 Put it to bed now  
 and walk out  
 into the dawn.

— Jeanne Rana

**but unique**

yes, we seem different  
 I just don't comprehend  
 why that's trouble

your world prefers spicy  
 mine, calmer fare  
 you grow red beans  
 I favor rice  
 you pray to Krishna  
 I, the ineffable  
 yet we all  
 love our children  
 we age and we die

we each eat, nurture  
 and pray—  
 may I learn from you  
 and you from me?

— Amrita Skye Blaine



**Manifesting Violets**

There is no such thing as Mastery  
 of wind wave or any other thing.  
 The only thing on offer is communion  
 a moment without location  
 finding itself empty,  
 so happy then  
 as to manifest  
 violets.

— Ayaz Angus Landman



**And This** — Amrita Skye Blaine**no gate**

great story  
 the gate between  
 here and there  
 here and awakening

awakening is  
 not over there  
 where  
 would that be?

no path no gate  
 no separation  
 between states  
 no states at all

hug your beloveds  
 ruffle your dog  
 there is nothing  
 to do but chuckle

**what's been broken**

*kintsugi*: golden joinery

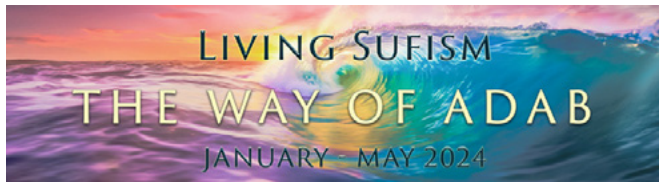
I sweep the shards  
 a tender pile  
 whether my daily bowl  
 or the sharp distress  
 of a heart rent open,  
 seeing my child endure

I do not dismiss  
 these broken shapes  
 pottery or premonitions  
 but lay them out  
 greet each piece  
 consider repair

and then it asks  
 the bowl the heart  
 for resin—  
 fluid gold

days may pass years  
 or even generations  
 remaking  
 something new

## Upcoming Online Programs



### Living Sufism

This year's theme is *The Way of Adab*. Open to all. For information and to register, click [here](#).



### A Matter of Life

*Climate Crisis and the Human Spirit*. September 8 – October 6, 2024. For information, click [here](#).



### Openings

Esoteric Study Class open to Sufi Way initiates and Open Path graduates. Click [here](#) for more information

## Every Thursday



### First Thursday:

#### ALANKARA

A classic style of Sufi communal contemplation.

Click [here](#) for more information



### Second Thursday:

#### SAMA

Musical meditations (zikr) with Murshida Suzanne Inayat-Khan and Omar Inayat-Khan

Click [here](#) for more information



### Third Thursday:

#### SHARING SILENCE

with Pir Elias.

Click [here](#) for more information



### Fourth Thursday:

#### A TIME FOR QUESTIONS

This is a time for asking Pir Elias any questions you might have.

Click [here](#) for more information



### Fifth Thursday:

#### ATTUNEMENTS

Community offerings of meditations and practices.

Click [here](#) for more information

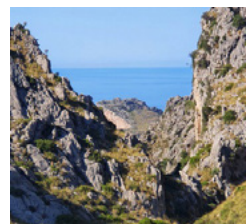
## Upcoming In-Person Programs



### Love's Caravan

A 6-day gathering with Pir Elias and Friends at the Sufi Temple, Murad Hassil, Katwijk-aan-Zee, Netherlands May 24 – 29, 2024

Click [here](#) for more information.



### Vision Quest in Spain

St Llorenc, Mallorca Illes de Balearis, Spain July 4 – 18, 2024

Click [here](#) for more information.