



Fresh Rain

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

SPRING 2020

IN THIS ISSUE: Essays by Leslie Gabriel Mezei, Mèhèra Bakker, Isha Francis, Vivien Quillin, Meg Rinaldi, and Pir Elias; Poetry by Carol Barrow, Jeanne Rana, Sabah Raphael Reed, and Yona Chavanne



Dear Friends,

I know others in this community have hurting, grieving hearts, too. How can we not? We're concerned about each other. The way we were living is on pause. Life is filled with—seemingly—more unknowns than usual.

And yet. In this issue, we have the loving hearts and gorgeous words of our Sufi Way family. Something to celebrate! I asked people to write, and wow, did you. I thank you all. We have a longer than usual issue but, then again, many of us now have lockdown time to read. Enjoy!

We have prose pieces from Leslie Gabriel Mezei, Mehera Bakker, Isha Francis, Vivien Quillin, Meg Rinaldi, and Pir Elias. Carol Barrow, Jeanne Rana, Yona Chavanne, and Sabah Raphael Reed offer us poetry.

We have changed the theme for the summer solstice issue. Let's consider **What Matters?** Thanks to Pir Elias for the theme.

With love for each one of you,
Amrita

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Grief Work

by Leslie Gabriel Mezei

Leslie Gabriel Mezei, leaving the hospital for the last time, where Annie, his wife of twenty-five years is in a deep coma after a nine-year struggle with a brain tumor.

My car is at my customary place in the hospital parking lot. I am usually the first here in the morning, if I go home at all. I'm driving home on the Don Valley Parkway. It's a crisp winter morning, the sunshine reflected from the icicles left by a storm. There are hardly any cars. I'm driving along automatically, hardly noticing, hardly controlling. Yet I keep trying to control life and death! Should she die? That's not in my hands. Should I die? Can I live with her loss? Should I? Maybe this life is like a road: once we are pointed in a direction, we need to do little to keep it up. From one moment to the next, the road is there, mile by mile, foot by foot. Yes, there are turnings, but if you want to deviate from the straight and narrow, you have to know where you want to go, and it takes extra attention and effort to make the change. And how do you know it will be any better?

The Parkway is a narrow, curvy road. People have been known to go out of control, to crash in a guardrail and be crushed. But to bring that on myself, to come to a screaming stop in a flaming crash—unimaginable. I may not know what I want, I may not know where my road leads, but I must believe that there is a road. Even for Annie. A heavenly road? She must believe that. Just think how serenely she lies there. And she said she would wait for me in Heaven.

All right then. I surrender. I don't know what's best, I don't know what to wish for. For Annie to die or live. For me to live or die. I accept, Lord above, whatever or whoever you are, I accept whatever will be.

I turn on the radio. There is a Bach cantata playing. It's a heavenly choir, the pure clear tones pierce my heart, raise my spirit up. I feel an indescribable joy and peace. And gratitude. We had a good life. "Thank you. I forgive you for our suffering, Oh Lord. Please, be good to her, and to me."

The road turns toward home, and the car with it, guided by—I know not who. The road is there, a road will be there. Our two children come to me, one on each side, hug me, put their lips to my cheeks, say cheerfully "one, two, three," and simultaneously deliver the most precious kiss ever.

As Annie passed on the next day, Gabriel found much solace in this first spiritual experience and was also finally able to do the necessary grief work for his father lost in the Holocaust.



Grief and Healing Through Music

by Mèhèra Bakker

It will be thirty-two years this year that my sister passed away. She was two years younger than me and not only my sister but my closest friend.

Although successful in many ways, she regularly had periods when she struggled with life, up to the point that she became suicidal. She would phone me whenever she was down and I would invite her to stay with me for some time. One day I told her that I could not help her myself, but that I knew a man who, although very busy, might be able to help. She immediately wrote a letter to Fazal Inayat-Khan. After a few days, he invited her to come to him and at some point he suggested that she would come and live near him in England for a while. However, she was reluctant to leave her family behind and only went to him for short visits. She would come back radiant and full of positive life energy which lasted for a short time.

One day, she committed suicide in a dramatic way. I was frozen, in total shock. How could she do that? How could she abandon her two beautiful young sons? There was no answer. Not very long after this drama, my sister appeared to me in a dream. She stood behind a glass door with her husband at her side. The glass door opened and I could not believe how she looked: in a state of bliss, pouring out love. She embraced me and whispered, "It's all right."

I never could talk with Murshid Fazal about my sister; I was still in shock.

One day Murshid Fazal invited Dahan and me for a dinner followed by a musical meditation.

Before the meditation, Fazal's partner told me how deeply shocked he had been by the death of my sister. I could only answer "I know."

Such evenings were attended by a few people on invitation, as Murshid Fazal used music for healing

in those years. Almost immediately after he had started to play and sing, I was overcome by a deep sadness, overwhelmed by the absence of my sister. However, at some point there came a shift and I entered into spaciousness and light: "it's all right, it's all right..." The next morning, Murshid Fazal called Sitara and she told him about my experience of the previous night. When I received the recording sometime later, Fazal had called it "Out of body."



Years before the death of my sister, Fazal and Kunderke had come to visit Dahan and me in Cyprus and we had listened together to Pablo Casals playing Bach's Suites. I mentioned then that the cello was talking to us, that this music was like a language.

This evening came back to my mind, when, two months before his passing, Murshid Fazal gave a lecture in a Summer programme, "Music as a language," in which he said that if someone grieves over a loss, he could not take on that grief, but what he could do was playing her music, in which she could let go.

Our Tree

by Isha Francis

We all have so many stories we can tell; so many ways to tell the story of our lives together.

Fadua and I first met in the summer of 1972 and lived and traveled our path first inspired by Murshid Fazal until the time came for Fadua to pass on in the summer of 2019. Here's one of those stories.

We always had a tree.

Once we went out in the snow and cut one down and brought it home and kept it in water and decorated it and put all our presents under it and then figured out how to have it returned to the earth when we were done with it.

Fadua didn't like having a live tree. On some level it hurt her to cut it; cut it down; end its life. It didn't matter that they were grown for that purpose; nor that someone else would probably choose it and they would cut it down. It just didn't matter.

While our daughter Ana was young and it mattered to her we kept it going with a 6 or 7 foot plastic tree. And we decorated it and put all our presents under it and then figured out how to store it so it wouldn't lose its shape while awaiting its next performance in 11.5 months. Not easy. And when Ana moved away we kept it going with a bit less decorating and a lot less presents under it.

And then Ana and Eric came home and grandkids Ethan and then Arden appeared in our lives and the tree really had to get going again in all her plastic shiny tinsel glory (for we had no pets and the kids weren't particularly tempted to eat the tinsel) with many more presents under it.

And then they moved away and the big tree just felt really way too big so we downsized to a 4 or 5 footer and kept the decorations and lights and when it was over (Fadua always insisted that the tree stay until Three King's Day...I mean who wouldn't appreciate a good epiphany) we would put it away with the usual care and concern.

So when we moved to Oregon and had the kids deep into our lives again, the 4-5 footer was good enough for a while

and out she came and on went the decorations and lights and tinsel and now the kids were big enough and not too cool yet so they would come over for hot chocolate and help us with the decorating knowing full well that they would find presents under it when the time came (though they could never be found when the time came to remove the decorations or put everything away or track down the leftover tinsel which somehow managed to find its way everywhere except on the tree or in the box).

And then a breeze played through our lives two Xmas ago and the tree just seemed too big and too much and the kids weren't coming over to help as much and we were taking the presents over to their house anyway on Xmas day and so we downsized to a little 2.5 footer that sits on a little table quite comfortably.

I managed to find some lights designed for such a little tree and put lots of tinsel but the decorations we always used were too big for our little tree and the presents wouldn't fit under it of course but they would fit around it and it was still Christmas although it was

harder for Fadua to engage actively she still liked it in her way and the kids would still come over and see us but it wasn't quite the same as it had been.

Then this year, hearing so many people saying how difficult the holidays would be and meeting people who for a year or two had turned Xmas off and didn't want to be there any more I wondered at that, and probably partly because my mom was such a party girl around the holidays and partly because Fadua really did love Christmas and partly because there were the kids and partly because I was alone in the house and really wanted a little light, even the little lights on our little tree were fine, and then I had a bunch of gifts and had to wrap them by myself (Fadua was such a good wrapper and had little tolerance for my messiness) and put them around the tree and then took them to the kids on Xmas day. And it was a lot of fun.

I took our tree down the day before Three Kings Day and put it back in its little box along with the tinsel and lights.

I still hope for an epiphany though.



Grief

by Vivien Quillin

Over the last twelve months, I've gradually become increasingly disabled through weak and painful muscles. No cure for this condition is in view. Since last summer, I've had to stop working in my beloved steep garden where, for many years, I'd spent several hours on most days. It was also necessary to limit my walks down the steep steps and slopes to sit by the pond or any of the other places where, wrapped round by woodland, I've been privileged to watch and listen to the wildlife and gaze across the valley.

Another passion and part of my spiritual practice has been to start the day by moving to music. It has been such a pleasure allowing music to dance me, like air, like flowing water, to a familiar music collection which has inspired and uplifted me. During the years, I've had enough temporary physical setbacks which have limited movement, that I've learnt to value my physical ability, knowing that it may be finite.

I'll speak of the dancing loss first. Trying to move with pain and a limited ability to raise my arms and legs, I wept with frustration and sorrow, comparing my "now" dance with how it used to be. I was unable to let the music wash through me because the pain was shouting louder. At times, I've not had the heart to dance at all. Rage has filled me. I lost gratitude that I can at least walk about. Sometimes it's been possible to dance my little shuffle through to a place where I could be glad of the many lovely blessings of life which are still here. Sometimes not. It has been interesting to feel rage and frustration at my limitations without blaming anybody, without making a story about it. Recently, I've grown sick of my mournful dance and have collected new music to move to. This has made it easier to let go of comparisons with how it used to be and to move with what is possible now.

I've become aware that I had pride in my ease of movement. There was some feeling of superiority to those who moved with less grace. It's been good for my humility that I now walk quite awkwardly, sometimes with a rolling waddle.

The garden. At first it was an agonising loss not to be in it. Then I began to watch myself defending my heart against this grief. Sometimes I've reminded myself of the pressure that I imposed on myself to care for sickly plants and to somehow "keep up." How often I kept on gardening

through a sense of necessity instead of letting go of control and allowing the plants to find their own way.

Distraction has been a help. I avoided going near the garden for a long time and busied myself with different ventures. In the newly freed-up hours, I've been able to write and sew and read more. I've discovered new ways of making art.

I'd be hit by guilt, imagining that my old friend the garden feels abandoned because I've found other interests. It is being neglected, but at the moment I can't bring myself to employ a gardener to tend it.



Having my hands in the soil or opening the light around a shrub by thoughtful pruning used to feel like being in and of the earth and sky. The last few years I've let go of requiring the garden to be just as I want and have worked much more with allowing it to have a strong say in what happens. This has led me to see the garden and nature as a friend where mutual nurturing occurs, rather than something to impose my will on. This has felt

quite spiritual. I've seen it as my link and connection with Life and the Universe.

Now that I can't tend the plants, I have to find a new way of relating to the garden that isn't about caring for it. It seems so distant to sit at the top and look down into it without touching. Without the spiritual connections of dance and gardening I've felt rather lost and untethered. The other day, I was feeling just that whilst having a cup of tea at the top of the garden and, looking down into it, I remembered Jamila inviting me to sing to the landscape with her. My uncertain voice began to tentatively hum and then sing. It was a beginning of a different way of connecting.

Last night, I went to our lovely Open Path group led by Simon Vivian in Malvern. As usual, we spoke of the open heart. Suddenly it came to me that my connection and sense of belonging was never about the dance or the garden. It was about the heart. It all would have been meaningless without my love.

It feels okay to defend my heart when emotional pain is too raw. But, in this moment, I'm feeling both the loss and the joy of what I had, and also excitement and delight about the new explorations with art and reading and writing. Phew, what a rainbow of feelings!

Papa

by Meg Rinaldi

My father died in 2016 at the tender age of ninety-nine. He was a feisty man, a scrappy son of immigrants. He lived and died on his own terms. We had a fiery relationship and, at some point, I accepted the fact that it would never be otherwise. We did get to the “I love you” part, but when he died, I felt relief.

Three weeks after his death, I had the distinct feeling that he was “around.” I felt his presence and I brushed it off many times. Then one evening, just as I had gotten into bed, I had the unmistakable sense of him standing at the foot of the bed. I was annoyed. I got out of bed, walked into our second bedroom assuming he’d follow and ungraciously said: “What do you want? You are supposed to be dead!”

He replied, “I don’t know where I am.”

“You’re dead. Be dead!” It did occur to me in that moment that death was not an address.

“I don’t know where I am!”

I hissed back at him, “I have five siblings, please ask them!”

“They can’t sense me, hear me, or see me. Only you can!”

Point well taken. I was standing in my pajamas at ten o’clock at night talking to what would appear to anyone else as thin air. Over the next few days, I sought out help for such a dilemma and received the support I needed both for my father and for myself. That process belongs in a book by itself. The fruits of this experience showed

themselves this past winter when my partner and I moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico. It was not an easy transition. The grief of this move weighed heavily on me. I was disoriented, depressed, even despondent at times.

At some point, it dawned on me that I could call upon those wise ones who had come before, ancestors of my lineage. Those who had immigrated willingly and those who had been dislocated by wars, famines, climate change, loss of food sources, economic upheavals, pandemics, and so on. Many people before me had gone through such transitions and survived. Some learned to thrive. Had those before me not made it, I’d not be here! That seems like such an obvious thing to say, but it was a revelation to me. As soon as I opened myself to their presence, their guidance and experience, my own suffering eased. Those who had gone before me also knew grief, mourning, loss. They knew the territory. I didn’t need to reinvent the terrain and I certainly was not alone. They had walked it and could share from their experience how to navigate it. It doesn’t mean I don’t forget and fall into a hard place from time to time, but my ancestors have proven themselves to be worthy guides and witness to the fact that life goes on and of the tenacious love that continues beyond death even in the midst of grief and loss.

Thanks, Papa for opening that door. I had always wanted to be seen by him, I didn’t know how clearly he had seen me both in this life and beyond: a great gift that only could have revealed itself after he left this world.



Tears in Heaven

by Pir Elias

In one of his poems, Keats wrote that the earth is “a valley where souls grow.” In that valley we souls learn to love, and in that valley we learn that *everything and everyone we love comes to an end*. To love greatly, to dare to love greatly, we cannot escape the grief of endings. That is the way it is here.

Looking back at my life, I confess I have often resisted accepting this. Being of an optimistic nature, I thought our mortal life could be experienced either optimistically or pessimistically, either as a beautiful place of celebration or as a veil of tears, and when I was younger I just wanted the story to end with the words “and they lived happily ever after.” But it doesn’t work that way. The denouement (if there is a denouement) is not polarized like that. It took a long life for me to see there’s another way to embrace the inherent dualism of our experience, the dualism of happy/sad, joy/grief, presence/absence, life/death.

Yes, the ultimate nature of the Real is, as the Tibetan Buddhists say, “All-Good,” or as the Sufis say, it is “the perfection of love, harmony, and beauty.” I am personally certain of this, not through thought or wishing, but in my bones. I know that sounds like a happy ending, and it is, and that our grief will be resolved in the All-Good, and it will, but not in the way we might think.

The words “the All-Good” and “the perfection of love, harmony, and beauty” are ways of trying to say the unsayable. They don’t quite succeed because, while we think we know what they mean, “meaning” itself can’t contain what the All-Good signifies. Whatever it is, and whatever we call it, the All-Pervading Presence of the All-

Good encompasses time and all its productions, and the timeless, and is still beyond both time and the timeless. It encompasses all of space and everything that happens in space, and yet it is beyond all dimension. The All-Good absorbs into itself all our love and all our grief, like a majestic symphony. All of it matters.

*“Jesus wept, though he knew the truth. Contemplating the world, enlightened Buddha shed that single tear.”** Our experience of earth life is not about arriving at a happy ending or a resolution to the pain and poignancy we experience here. Our journey is about the mystery of becoming and transfiguration. It is in this way that our grief, and our joy and love, are the valley in which our souls grow and are transfigured.

Time carves in our faces little lines, like canyons are carved into the earth’s surface. Those lines and canyons are beautiful, and along with each white hair on our heads, they are hard won. By the time we come to die, we are marked deeply by this life. The beauty we’ve experienced and the stupid mistakes we’ve made, the love we’ve shared and the losses we’ve endured, all of it comingles in our singular presence, in our *soul*, this most intimate crucible of transfiguration. “The soul is a current,” Inayat Khan said, picturing our soul-crucible as a river, a flowing, an offering to the sea. In this image we may be able to glimpse how our love and grief are an inseparable whole, and how our tears make heaven glisten.

*From “Bittersweet,” in *Free Medicine*.



Grief

grief,
you have visited me often—
deaths, young and old;
lost lovers;
world catastrophes.
many times,
when i've felt too sorry
for myself,
you've knocked me
to my knees
looked me in the eyes
and reminded me that
we don't grieve alone.
you are a thread
connecting us
to each other—
to the mother in Africa
sitting next to her baby's
lifeless body,
to the father whose son
shot up too many drugs,
to the crying child alone
on the dirt floor of
a migrant camp,
to everyone,
for no one can escape you.
grief,
you are our broken hearts
knit together as one.



—Carol Barrow

the poisoned field

that marriage
a poisoned field
don't try
to trace the story
or find blame
two people loved and hurt
salted their fields
and looked out upon
devastation

what to salvage?
floods of tears
to the tenth generation
and three babies
who will say
I come from a broken home

we work with what remains
stock the first aid kit
for any small wounds
we can fix
and then limp away

—Jeanne Rana



Grief

The world turns.
Sun rises, moon sets.

Grief comes gushing
down the hill—
like wet slurry
engulfing
homes.

Stones scatter.
Hearts shatter.

We come compelled to help—
to dig and draw aside
the broken branches
and the splintered
slates.

Touching each other
gently on the
arm.

Love, even here,
comes shining
through.

The world turns.
Sun rises, moon sets.

—Sabah Raphael Reed



eventually

eventually
it all means nothing
the trunk in the attic
filled with faded mementos
and letters from the dead to the dead

eventually
we won't remember
which piece of cut glass
came from Ohio
which quilt was made
by the French grandma

who are these men
standing under a tree
in this sepia-toned photo
with curled edges?
the short smiling one
could be Uncle Frank
or... this could be
the afternoon of the christening
and these are the menfolk
from the other side of the family

we could scan
these photos
save them online

or toss them
we don't remember
for sure who anyone is

it all means nothing
eventually

—Jeanne Rana



Grieving

Grieving.
When losing beloved ones, we grieve.
We suffer their absent presence, our past intimacy.
But doesn't this intimacy remain present in our depths?
Grieving: a small step towards realizing impermanence.
"Die before you die" "Die before dying."

Grieving, after the warm, purifying, salty flow of tears, opens reservoirs of memory, images of moments we often never lived so intensely when they were happening, sometimes we did, yet often in more fragmented ways, tainted by past and future. And now, there is no past and no future.

Pure presence. A warmth. A resting place in the mist of nowhere
The still point around which our dance evolves.
There, where the immense seamless cosmos becomes friendly, we are.
Even when it feels unfriendly, we are.
We are and we are not.

Awake presence brings us spaciousness, an emptiness not felt as lack, rather a sense of living presence sensed as light love encompassing all.
After grieving, a layer of joyful sadness,
although absence also means aloneness, solitude, nothingness...
This is a place from where facing the mystery.

—Yona Chavanne



Upcoming Programs 2020



BEING MORTAL

The Grace of Living, Aging, and Dying
A Four-Day Retreat with Pir Elias Amidon
Aldermarsh Retreat Center,
Whidbey Island, Washington
April 23 – 26, 2020

Rescheduled to July 27 – 30, 2020



BEING MORTAL

The Grace of Living, Aging, and Dying
A Four-Day Retreat with Pir Elias Amidon
New Eden Retreat Centre, Sparjeburd,
Hemrik, the Netherlands
September 3 – 6, 2020



BEING MORTAL

The Grace of Living, Aging, and Dying
A Five-Day Retreat with Pir Elias Amidon
Poulstone Court Retreat Center, Herefordshire, UK
May 23 – 27, 2020

Rescheduled to Sept. 23 – 27, 2020



BEING MORTAL

The Grace of Living, Aging, and Dying
A Four-Day Retreat with Pir Elias Amidon
Himmelreich Retreat Center, Lindau, Germany
September 16 – 20, 2020

