



Fresh Rain

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

SPRING 2022

IN THIS ISSUE: Prose by Amrita Skye Blaine, Isha Francis, Sabah Raphael Reed, Umtul Valeton-Kiekens, and Kunderke Noverraz; Poetry by David Chapman, Sabah Raphael Reed, Lysana Robinson, Ayaz Angus Landman, Amrita Skye Blaine, and Jeanne Rana



Dear Friends,

This Spring's theme is **Doors, Windows, and Gates. Thresholds!** We received prose contributions from Sabah Raphael Reed, Isha Francis, Amrita Skye Blaine, Kunderke Noverraz, and Umtul Valeton-Kiekens. Poetry includes David Chapman, Ayaz Angus Landman, Amrita Skye Blaine, Lysana Robinson, Sabah Raphael Reed, and Jeanne Rana. Enjoy their offerings. And special thanks to Mèhèra who provided Sufi Inayat Khan's writings. The beautiful illustration in this issue was painted by Umtul Valeton-Kiekens. The equally splendid calligraphies were done by Saadi Bitter.

For Summer, let's consider **Chillas**. Have you been given them? Have you ever given yourself one? What did you learn?

There's something new in this issue of *Fresh Rain*: a column titled "And This." For its spring debut it's up front (on page 2) to bow and say hello; in future issues, it will move to its natural home on the last page, above the calendar of events. It sprang to life after I asked Elias if I could share a few intuitions and reflections on nondual understanding, reminders I employ to keep waking myself up. Sometimes these come as poems, sometimes prose; I think of them as "notes to self" and wanted to share them. Once the column is established and has found its voice, I'll invite you to contribute. In this first offering I dive into my love affair with the word "threshold." Over the decades, it has become a friendly word, inviting me inward.

Thanks to all who offer their deep hearts for Fresh Rain. Please consider writing for future issues. Share yourself in this way with our larger community.

With love for each one of you,

Amrita

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And This

—Amrita Skye Blaine

Life can turn in an instant. Headed, it seemed, in one direction, I suddenly found myself terrified, thrust in another. No control.

That summer night in 1974, in labor, I knew I was facing single motherhood. But the following morning, life changed when the pediatrician stroked his finger across the brow of my tiny son before saying, “I’m sorry to have to tell you this. The cardiologist just confirmed Iman has a life-threatening heart defect, and faces open-heart surgery when he’s older.”

Alarm flushed through me. Even the slant of light shifted in the room.

I took initiation in the Ruhaniat in November, 1971. Moineddin, head of the order and my teacher, gave me twice-a-day practices. Thrilled to have a spiritual path, I happily took them on, and sat in front of my altar morning and evening.

The skinny under-five-pound child I carried home three years later was uncomfortable in his body. It took more



energy than he had to nurse. He screamed. A lot. He awakened wailing three times a night. I was beyond exhausted. No more sitting down twice a day, focused on spiritual practice. Yet, more than ever, I needed the stability it could provide. For weeks, I puzzled over what to do. Finally, feeling guilty that I wasn’t doing the specific practices I had been given, I invented my own support while walking and soothing my cranky infant. One survived—my threshold practice—always with me since that time.

There are many kinds of thresholds; some physical, some metaphorical. Stepping over a threshold, I’d stop, take one empty breath, and begin afresh. Entering a hospital elevator. Walking into the pediatric intensive care unit. With my baby in a front pack, stepping out the door into hopeful morning sunlight. Watching him carried away for an invasive medical procedure.

Forty-eight years later, this practice still lives inside of me. Stop. Take a breath. Begin again.

Threshold

by Isha Francis

Threshold: “...the magnitude of intensity that must be exceeded for a certain reaction, phenomenon, result, or condition to occur or be manifested...”

In the moment of first awakening, the intensity, the depth of the fear was overwhelming such that I would not, could not, move. The darkness of the room, slowly challenged by the light of the coming day, the call of the muezzin, the movement within the hallway, all daring me to rise, to take at least one small step.

And so, slowly, I did. One foot in front of the other, around the room, glancing out the shaded window, fearing who or what? To the bathroom. Was the changing of clothes a first suggestion that I might dare?

Three days I had hidden here, a terror both of day and night. Nothing solid, all formless and deep, no shape to say, “I see you, come out of the shadow.” I knew it was all inside. There was nothing in the closet or, as when I was five, under the bed. There was no one outside the room or the hallway or the building remorselessly waiting for me to appear.

The more the fear wrapped itself around me, within me, the stronger grew the need ... can I call it that yet, a need? Had it become quite personal by now that it was “me” that made that first movement out of the bed around the room?

Explanations, analysis, understanding matter not at all. It is only so that somehow I was—with some impulse unsourced, unnamed and impossible to defy—brought to the door, allowed to turn the handle and, avoiding that dark voice wishing not yet to forgive, threw it wide open all and at once.

Then within a long and abiding silence, it clutched at me, embracing my heart with such a dread I was frozen. And there in that moment, it was not courage, it was not some deep inspiration or god-like message reaching in to me, calling me to be free of it ... no, it was the immediacy of a pain-filled recognition that it needed me, it was afraid of losing me, of remaining in that room after I had long departed.

Then came a deep sigh escaping from me as only a first breath may. And allowing that embrace to remain so powerfully around me, I stepped through and over the threshold, bowing to whatever may then be.

Thresholds on an Open Path

by Sabah Raphael Reed

The wisdom teachings of the Open Path continue to intrigue and mystify me—especially the central tenets of non-dual awareness and *unbounded wholeness*.

Oftentimes I experience such teachings as *exquisite mystical realizations*, sometimes I'm disappointed when crystal clear insights retreat behind a veil, and from time to time I feel frustrated by metaphysical wordplay.

Throughout this dance I remind myself to relax into the *sacred current of continuous initiation*. There is no need to know and no way of stopping that which is always present and always unfolding. The beauty of these wisdom teachings, and our Pir, are a constant and reliable source of love.

*Beloved, you keep pouring this moment into the next
and you don't leave a clue how you do it.
I'm in love with that pouring.*

(Pir Elias, Munajat, p25)

Increasingly, I've been asking myself how the Open Path teachings can help us to stay present, awake and engaged with what is happening in the world right now when what is happening brings such a sense of deep existential crisis. It feels almost as if the benign, beautiful continuous pouring of the Beloved is being increasingly constricted through the destructive constructs of human folly.

Everywhere we turn, we witness immense suffering. The pernicious war in Ukraine; escalating ecological collapse; a global pandemic with significant impacts especially in the global south and the poorest communities around the world; the entrenchment of dictators and erosion of democracies. The long arc of the moral universe might well bend towards justice, to quote Dr Martin Luther King, but right now that is hard to feel. For some, the cry that now goes up is *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

The current crises also put me in a state of anxious anticipation, where my *What If* mind kicks in. I can't help but feel that we have collectively reached some critical thresholds. *What if* the war in Ukraine escalates into a third world war with the annihilatory use of nuclear weapons? *What if* the climate emergency has passed the tipping point as many believe, such that systemic unraveling of the planetary ecosystem is assured? *What if* Covid is just a prelude to other even more devastating interspecies pandemics? *What if* conditions of existence now are predetermining far more painful conditions of existence in the future?

Threshold: a moment or place of transition from one state to another.



Actually being directly in a moment of profound change, such that a threshold is crossed and is experienced as such, is different from witnessing or waiting for it, when anticipatory anxiety can arise. In my own life

this was most vividly expressed during the period when my husband was ill with cancer. I remember sitting with him in the hospital ward during the first rounds of chemotherapy, and looking over at others at a more difficult stage of the journey. *How*, I wondered, *was any of what they were going through endurable?* In some ways I was still placing myself, and able to hold myself, outside the experience. As time passed and we became the couple sitting in that more difficult place, and especially toward the end when my husband was approaching death, that sense of separation from the immediate moment and everything present in that moment, completely dissolved. There was pain and suffering, grief and distress, but there was also intense joy, profound love and a connection with life—up to and beyond the point of death—that transcended words. There was also no pause before action. What needed to be done in each moment was clear and there was no hesitation in my being—no holding back.

In his most recent *Notes from the Open Path* (March 2022) Pir Elias calls our responsiveness to the suffering of others and to painful conditions of existence an expression of *the evolving soul of the world*. Our interconnectedness and our awareness of our interconnectedness deepen our capacity to manifest the *one vast soul—a world soul*—itself a radical form of activism.

But his teaching also reminds us that whatever the conditions of existence in this material and conditioned world, however brutal and destructive they may become, there is *always* the ineffable, indestructible and infinite flow of pure and open awareness. Such Presence gathers us up in its mystical embrace and opens us beyond reactivity and fear. It brings, not mystical escapism into the hereafter, but profound awakening to life—right here, right now—no matter what.

This for me is the true blessing of the Open Path—a sacred reminder that unbounded wholeness unites all creation and that we are always resourced by the mysteries of heaven and earth.

Harmony Through Thresholds

by Umtul Valeton-Kiekens

Every instant of our lives is like a threshold. We are hanging in the buoyancy of not knowing what the next instant will bring us. We surely must have an innate trust, otherwise we would live in a constant state of fear. We take very simple things, we do daily as if it were absolutely normal—and it is—but if we come to think about it, it is often, besides the trust we hold in our hearts, an act of cunning balance.

Look at our breath for instance, how naturally it takes place without any effort or thought, and yet our breath is coming from beyond and connects us to the One and All. Besides this connectivity, our bodies pass a threshold every time our chest moves in and out, giving us oxygen and getting rid of the used air.

So we can go on with mentioning daily miracles; you do not have to be clairvoyant in order to see them. For example, look closely when you or someone else is walking. It is an act of balance and it looks like you are, between the steps, floating. What a trust you have in your balance! Every step you take there is a non-touching of the earth, you tip-toe as it were, in ultimate buoyancy. Really if you properly thought about what you are doing, you could lose balance.

There is a saying from Inayat Khan, about what is meant by the story of Jesus walking over the waters toward his friends waiting for him in their fishing boats. He said this: "Walking on the water suggests a great philosophy, rather than just a phenomenon, meaning: to live in the world and yet to keep above it."

Living on the coast in the Netherlands, I regularly walk along the seaside, and there especially I often experience this in-between state of not belonging anywhere, of buoyancy, and yet being at one with everything.

I neither belong to the earth, nor to the waters, not to the air, nor am I burning in the fire ... my heart is here and beyond. It is like passing a threshold, into a sacred space.



Recently my beloved went beyond. He crossed an important threshold, and yet—

I can feel him in my heart often. I have to let go of many thoughts, images, dreams and expectations but, if and when I can do that, I am crossing over that threshold, to the realm where hearts are connected, for now and ever onwards.



In the garden of the Rothko chapel, in Houston, Texas, there is the sculpture by Barnett Newman, named "Broken Obelisk." It is sitting in the middle of a pond, and its image is reflected in the water. I am fascinated by its possible meaning, it is broken and yet this image in the foreground of the chapel is one of ultimate harmony. The door with its threshold to enter the chapel is open and invites us in for prayer or a moment of silence. The obelisk may be broken but your heart may be healed in this sacred place of beauty and harmony.



Photos and artwork by Umtul Valeton-Kiekens

Ya Salaam—A Prayer for Peace

by Kunderke Noverraz

A threshold was crossed at 5 a.m. February 24, 2022 as missiles landed and war began. We, here in Europe, are gripped with horror as we see images of people who look like us fleeing their shattered homes, sheltering in subways and with grim faces handling guns. It shakes us out of our complacency; we can no longer pretend that this kind of thing no longer happens here in Europe, that it belongs out there with others, exotic peoples far away. We are shaken to face the fact that this is happening here right now and that no one knows how and when it will end. We are not exempt from the tragedies of war after all. I, like everyone else I know, feel agitated, deep grief and compassion mixed with insecurity about the future for us all. This is a new era. After two years of the pandemic coupled with a growing anxiety about climate change, we now live with the reality that we too are close to the hardships and suffering that war brings, and with the threat of nuclear war in the air we wonder what will happen next.

In such a moment we feel a natural impulse to turn to prayer. "Please Beloved, let this nightmare end and let there be peace again; let your love prevail." We would like to appeal to a God who could change our human affairs for the better, a Being who will respond to our prayers if they are sincere and fervent enough. Alas, as a non-dualist

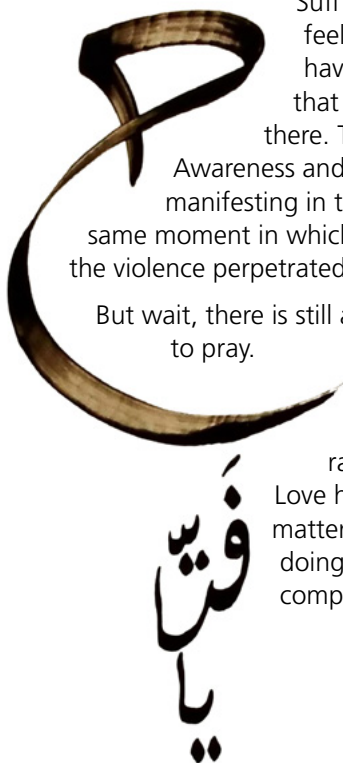
Sufi this is not a solace that I feel I can turn toward as I have too deeply absorbed that there is no Other out there. There is only Pure

Awareness and the Source of All manifesting in this moment now, this same moment in which I feel fear and grief at the violence perpetrated on and by my neighbors.

But wait, there is still a value in opening myself to pray.

This moment we live now remains full of the radiance of love and peace.

Love has never gone away, no matter what we humans are doing to each other, and our compassion is evidence of this.

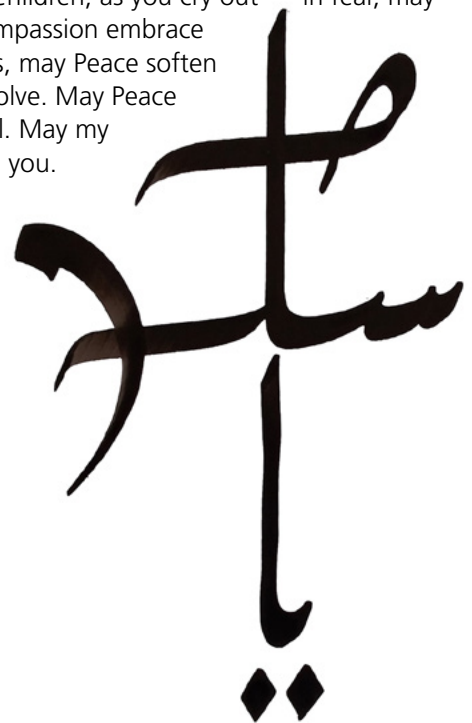


"Yā Fattāh" by Saadi Bitter

And likewise there is a Peace that is more profound than whatever we humans are enduring. There is a Source of Peace that is here now, unblemished. As I pray, I open myself to this Peace and let it calm my agitated emotions. And as I open I begin to feel a deeper communion with my fellow human beings, my brothers and sisters; we are after all One. I want to believe that so many of us praying together will not only bring us closer to each other but will also bring a powerful force into the field of human existence. Who knows what spontaneous actions may rise out of this energy we create together. And so I pray.

I pray with the wazifa of Ya-Salaam and let the sound resonate in my heart, body and mind as I repetitively invoke this Divine Name of God. Ya-Salaam means "Oh Peace" and it points us to a peace that is far deeper than any peace we can find in our messy world. It is the very source of peace, enduring and unending and entwined with the Loving Compassion that holds us all so tenderly. Praying Ya-Salaam soothes my agitated feelings, calms my mind, and allows me to open my heart wider to those who are suffering. I repeat Ya Salaam, Ya Salaam, Ya Salaam, Ya Salaam whilst I engage in my daily activities, whilst I go for a walk, whilst I sit in the car, whilst I cook the meal, until I can feel this sacred quality as a vibrant presence. I open myself toward the people that are at war and acknowledge their suffering and wish them Peace. Soldiers, as you reach for your gun, may Peace make you hesitate. Children, as you cry out in fear, may Peace and Compassion embrace you. Politicians, may Peace soften your stony resolve. May Peace be with you all. May my prayer be with you.

Ya-Salaam,
Ya-Salaam,
Ya-Salaam.



"Yā Salām" by Saadi Bitter



Threshold

Standing at the threshold
 I see your face
 Can I enter in?
 Where is the way?

I see your face
 If only for a moment
 Where is the way?
 Listen to your heart

If only for a moment
 Gaze and gaze again
 Listen to your heart
 I am I am

Gaze and gaze again
 Now you're through
 I am I am
 Disappeared into

Now you're through
 Was there a threshold?

—David Chapman



Ya Salaam—Oh Peace!

Spread peace, for "Spreader of Peace" is one of the names of God

Mouth upon nipple, milk flowing peace.
 Rippling sunset, dark veiling peace.
 River through delta, slow streaming peace.
 Quiet beyond last breath, still point of peace.

Keening through shattered stones, heartbreaking peace.
 Holding the broken ones, weeping for peace.
 Walking the scattered roads, searching out peace.
 Calling your name Salaam, come to us—Peace.

—Sabah Raphael Reed

Sunrise Today

I've awoken this Sunday morning
 with eyes half-closed
 against unusually bright sunlight,
 after a long, dark winter
 buffeted by persistent Atlantic gales.

In Kyiv I can imagine them
 shielding their sun-dazzled eyes
 as they emerge from the night
 sheltering deep underground
 in bomb shelters.

Huddled against the night
 we awaken bewildered
 to the brightness
 of starkly contrasting sunrises.

How Blessed am I,
 shielding my eyes as I fearlessly gaze
 at brilliantly sparkling sea and
 majestic snow-clad mountains.
 My eyes fill with tears,
 as I sing, sending Love and Light
 into the air we share.

How Blessed am I,
 eyes filling with tears of gratitude,
 as will all eyes
 when Peace prevails,
 as it surely will,
 if we dare
 to truly live it.

—Lysana Robinson
 Sunday 27th February 2022



The Call of the Wild

Who knows
 What's going to
 Break me
 And when

For years I sit
 Tending the fire
 Then in one ordinary
 Moment
 A gust of wind
 And a corridor
 Of reparation opens
 A corridor that streams
 Like a current
 Of black and gold
 Touching the feet
 Of infinite sorrow
 Leaving that place
 Within
 Pruned of yesterdays
 Summer
 And ready again
 To answer
 The call of the wild

—Ayaz Angus Landman

threshold

a pantoum in practice

window door or gate
 entrance to another place
 a change a shift—fresh start
 clean breath new step



entrance to another place
 look down, the doorsill beckons
 clean breath new step
 begin again again and yet again

look down, the doorsill beckons
 breath will cleanse your heart
 begin again again and yet again
 a new threshold awaits

breath will cleanse your heart
 open wide and trust
 a new threshold awaits
 be brave and take that step

window door or gate
 a change a shift—fresh start

—Amrita Skye Blaine

Quotes from the *Gayan*

by Sufi Inayat Khan

The absence of generosity means that
 the doors of the heart are closed.
 Nothing from within can come out and
 nothing from without can enter.

The heart of man is a temple.
 When its door is closed to man,
 it is also closed to god.

The heart is the gate of god.
 As soon you knock on it,
 The answer comes.

OPEN ME!

a door with no walls
 calls out to us all
 OPEN ME! OPEN ME! OPEN ME!
 I am the portal
 to the world beyond winds
 I am the edge
 the end of the path
 I am the gingerbread
 door in the woods
 I am the entrance to olde Faerie
 you don't need a guide
 you don't need a key
 I am your door
 OPEN ME!

a door without walls
 in a summer field calls
 OPEN ME! OPEN ME! OPEN ME!
 you are a wanderer
 you are alone
 I am your home
 OPEN ME!



a door without walls
 in the halls of your mind
 calls out in the night
 OPEN ME!
 I am the answer
 to all of this pain
 for an attitude change
 OPEN ME!

a door without walls
 at the edge of the lake
 calls out on the breeze
 OPEN ME!
 I am the entry
 to the watery world
 put stones in your shoes
 OPEN ME!

a heavy wood door
 in the wall of my heart
 calls out in the dark
 OPEN ME!
 I am the beginning
 and I am the end
 I am the Friend
 OPEN ME!

—Jeanne Rana

Upcoming Online Programs



Just This

The Heart-Essence of the Open Path
An Online Retreat with Pir Elias and friends

March 12 - April 23, 2022
(This program is underway)



Living Sufism 2022

REACHING OUT~REACHING IN
Love in a Divided World

First Sundays, January – June, 2022
Click [here](#) for more information



Attunements

A Monthly Program of Sufi Practices

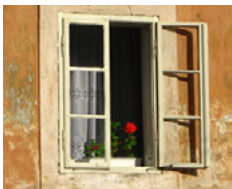
Starting in January, 2022
Click [here](#) for more information



Sama

Monthly online communal
musical meditations

Click [here](#) for more information



Openings

Monthly meetings of Sufi Way
initiates and Open Path graduates

Click [here](#) for more information

Upcoming In-Person Programs



Human Being

Where Soul and World Meet

A Four-Day Retreat with Pir Elias

**New Eden Retreat Center,
Netherlands June 7-11, 2022**

**Himmelreich Retreat Center,
Germany June 15-19, 2022**

Click [here](#) for more information

