



Fresh Rain

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

WINTER 2016

IN THIS ISSUE: Reflections on "Death and Dying" by Sufi Inayat Khan, Kunderke Noverraz, Amrita Skye Blaine, and Pir Elias; poems by Jeanne Rana and Celia Snow



Dear Friends,

In this winter issue, we reflect on the theme of "Death and Dying"—either physical death, or the release of the egoic sense of being a separate self.

Mehera Bakker searched and provided the quotes from Sufi Inayat Khan. Thank you, Mehera!

Elias opens the prose section with a poignant letter he wrote to his father right after he died. Kunderke Noverraz speaks of an African woman she had the privilege to get to know who had a deep relationship with her dead husband.

Jeanne Rana offers a poem on the spirits who live among us, and a second one, comprised of short death stanzas she wrote in the tradition of the samurai. Celia Snow writes about her vision quest experience of surrendering all.

In the Spring issue we will consider "**Community**," and in Summer, "**Aging**." Some among us are assisting aging parents, and can provide an experiential perspective. Those of us who are already elders can speak from our experience, and perhaps the offerings will be guideposts for the younger folk. I surely wish the older people I knew had shared their experience, but times were different then.

My thanks to all of you who contribute. We would have no "Fresh Rain" without you!

with love to you all,

Amrita

editor, Fresh Rain: freshrain@sufiway.org



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Life and Death

— SUFI INAYAT KHAN



Intelligence in its original aspect is the essence of life, the spirit, or God. Intelligence being caught by the mind and body becomes the soul. It is only a condition of the Intelligence which is the soul.

The whole of manifestation is the creation of Intelligence. The Zât, the primal Intelligence becomes captive in knowledge; that which

is its sustenance limits it, reduces it: and pain and pleasure, birth and death are experienced by the Intelligence in this capacity, which we call life.

Death, in point of fact does not belong to the soul and so, it does not belong to the person. Death comes to what the person knows, not to the person himself. Life lives, death dies. But the mind, which has not probed the depth of the secret of life, becomes perplexed and unhappy over the idea of death.

A person once went to a Sufi and asked him “What happens after death?” He said “Ask this question of someone who will die, of some mortal being, which I am not.”

At the Death of My Father

— ELIAS AMIDON

For over thirty-five years, until his death in 1997, my father and I carried on a correspondence—hundreds of letters back and forth. We wrote about everything—life, death, love, art, politics, religion. Shortly after he died I wrote him a final letter that I read at his memorial service. The following is an edited version of that letter.

Dear Pop,

Well, you did it. You died! All these years that we’ve talked and written about it, with dread and curiosity, asking that its nearness make us love our lives even more—and now you’ve gone and done it!

I remember the last part of a letter you wrote to me a couple of years ago—you wrote:

“I try to imagine how the end will come. There’s got to be some humor in it.

I’m reclining in my big chair. The people I love are around me. One is softly scratching my head (I love that). Two of my women are holding my hands. You can choose who will hold my big toes. Big fan-fares are coming from the Hi-Fi. Ready? Now? NOW! Whee! And I’m off into deep space. Hoop! Hoop!

I know, scenarios like this never come true, that’s why they have to be a little funny.”



You were right, that scenario didn’t come true. You lay alone in your bed, in the dark hours before dawn, and simply let go. Died, passed through, passed away. Where? Where did you go? “Off into deep space” like you imagined? Did you rise up through the walls and the roof of the house, up above the trees, up into the night until you could see the aura of the Earth, the light in the east coming toward you across the ocean? Or was there no seeing, no Earth, no dawn in the east but instead a dawn inside you, enormous in its intimacy?

I pray you surrendered to that dawn, that you let its light shine through where your body was, where your thoughts puzzled and talked, where your selfness made its shape—I pray such a dawn took you, I pray by all the good spirits you didn’t believe in, by the ineffable God you didn’t believe in, that you flew into that light, that you received the great Mystery’s embrace with a humble heart.

You and I loved talking about the Mystery, didn’t we? How we orbited around it, curious and inconclusive! I remember coming a thousand times to the same fork in the path where we parted company, you saying the Universe wasn’t personal, me saying it was only personal—both of us amazed that that might mean the same thing.

"Remember the Mystery!" you always said. "Remember we don't really know anything!" That was brave, considering how much you wanted to know, how you loved to imagine the galaxies and quasars and supernovas way off in the impossible distances, to imagine the little atoms, the valences of oxygen and carbon you told me about, and how all of it took all the time it needed to make life, to evolve from single cells to the Earth's teeming life, all without a Santa-Claus-God dreaming it up. You loved saying the Sufi mantra I told you about: "*Nothing matters, and everything matters,*" trying your best not to clutch onto either side. That made you a kind of poet-scientist, an activist-philosopher who realized the only thing to do in the face of that enigma was to love and be grateful.

Oh Papa, how shall I bear it, not having you in this world? Our lives were so entangled! Mine has been an exercise in trying to complete yours, to realize and fulfill what you could not. Now that you are realized and fulfilled, blossoming in the heart of the Mystery, what am I to do?

I arrived from the airport at night and went straight to the funeral home to see you. They kindly wheeled you out on a gurney—your simple, naked body covered in a sheet—and left us alone. The room was white, cold, no furniture. I spoke with you. You didn't move, you didn't breathe, though I swear you kept up your side of the conversation. I brought that little carved wooden bird I gave you and Ma years ago, and put it in your hands, asking that you take it to her.

Touching your hands, lifting them off your chest, curling your fingers around that bird, the gift of your life to me was so clear. It was in your hands, your marvelous hands. I remembered your hands holding me when I was little, your hands pulling the American Flyer sled I sat on, up the snowy street; your hands showing me how to fish out on Long Island Sound, waiting for the nibbles; your hands making things down in the basement, sanding wood, mixing glues, the confident contact and exploration of the world's things; your hands deftly holding a camel hair brush, turning and magically making shapes across the paper, your hands an extension of your eyes; your hands holding Ma in the kitchen when you came home from work (I was so glad you did!). Your hands were large, long-fingered but not delicate, perfect for your world. And they taught me without being didactic. When I lifted them off your chest, our hands touched for the last time—it felt uncanny—whose hands were whose? Mine alive and moving, yours cold and still, and yet, the Mystery continues, it doesn't skip a beat: your hands are glorious, alive, and continue expressing themselves in the world—in my hands, in my daughters' and son's.



Here, let me end this now—but how? I can't bear to end it. You were always good at endings, those dramatic flourishes....

How about I end with that poem I wrote you and my own son when you turned 80—so that whoever hears these words may honor their own lineages as we did.

*To you my father, I reach, almost touching,
your eight decades of moments falling away
like huge snowflakes in the lamplight,
watching how you wait with such sad curiosity
for the end of the storm—*

*and to you, my teenage son, I reach, almost touching,
as in ignorance and faith you assume
the debts of our race
and I am helpless to save you.*

*How intimate, how distant, we three men—
walking with each other on the same ground,
good-hearted, mortal, and
how dear we are, to walk in this world
so innocent, so weathered, so amazed!*

*We are the generations of men
hoping to do our best
in a world we didn't ask for.
May a way be prepared for us,
may our gestures be pure,
may we bless the future
with the continuity of our love.*

Next to the Ocean

— KUNDERKE NOVERRAZ

Some years ago I met a woman who was living with her dead husband. Eunice was a striking tall African woman and her wise presence immediately attracted me. She appeared to me as someone who was at peace with herself and her world and had lived deeply.

Her small white house stood alone in a vast landscape of breathtaking beauty next to the turbulent Indian Ocean in a tribal area of South Africa. Green hills rolled to a rocky shore where waves crashed and sea birds were circling. Inside her home there was a large portrait of a smiling Khotso in the living room and in their bedroom his *sangoma* (herbalist shaman) regalia were neatly arranged on his bed. He had been dead for thirty years but his strong presence permeated the house and Eunice was in constant communication with him.

We became friends and gradually I learned about her life. Khotso had been one of the famous sangomas of his time, and people had flocked from all over South Africa to consult him and obtain his herbal and spiritual remedies. The wealth thus generated, enabled him to marry many wives and Eunice had been one of twenty-six. This was difficult for her but she found consolation in the fact that he had felt a special spiritual connection with her. As he was dying he told her that she and her two daughters would inherit his place of spiritual retreat. He said that while the other wives could have his bones and the big house in town, she would have his spirit and the small house by the sea. And so it happened. After his death in 1972 she went to live on her own by the sea, raised her children and deepened her relationship with him. She lived by his rules—no alcohol, smoking or dishonesty—and embarked on a spiritual journey under his guidance. She prayed, fasted, drummed and danced, learnt about herbs and rituals until she too became recognised as a sangoma. Every year in spring she would hold ancestral rites attended by the whole local community, and throughout the year people would come to her for counsel and healing.

She talked to me of her spiritual journey. How fearful she had been in the beginning to live all by herself amongst this powerful nature. How difficult it had been with the other wives who were contesting her sole right to this little house and how hard it was to make a living here. How anguished and depressed she had often felt. But then the transformation, the growing inner peace and appreciation of her solitude, her meditations and the close presence of Khotso. She would not exchange her life for any other now.

And death? She was not afraid. For her, the world of the dead was full of another life, a powerful presence in which



the spirit is both in contact with the world of the living and with the great power of creation itself. Under the influence of Christianity modern people refer to this original creative force as God, but for the ancients and for sangomas, God is not a personal being. Instead It is vast, mysterious, formless but underlying all manifestation and expressing itself most powerfully in the forces of nature. The sea, the winds, the forest and the animals all throb with this power, but so do the dead. Eunice's whole universe was alive and vibrant and communicating. Crossing over the threshold between the living and the dead was therefore not really a separation and certainly not oblivion.

This way of thinking and belief may seem at first very alien to Westerners. We tend to think of death as going into darkness, of losing everything, of being cruelly separated and then entering into oblivion or some kind of paradise, depending on one's worldview.

But it is not as alien to us as it might appear. Many westerners too have feelings and thoughts about an after-life that consoles and gives them fortitude in the face of death.

Those of us that were present at the Katwijk gathering in August will remember the moving answer Murshid Karimbaksh gave when asked how he was coping with the sudden tragic death of his son and his family. His deeply felt response was that they were not gone and that his son was even closer to him now and that it was this which was giving him solace.

And where do I myself stand with all of this? It would of course be easy to dismiss the thoughts of spirits that continue to converse with the living as a wishful fantasy to console oneself. We grieve those we have lost and we fear surrendering our personality to an unknown that obliterates all that we have known and loved. To believe that we can continue with loving relationships even after death reassures us that something of us will continue through a love which is stronger than death. Death seems not so final after all.

But I am not someone who can accept ideas and beliefs simply because they will make me feel better. My training in psychotherapy was teaching that the way to look at such experiences is as internalisations within the psyche of the living individual. The dead person remains present in this sense only. And yet ... I also have deep respect for the integrity of the experience of Eunice and Murshid Karimbaksh, and have had a strong inner experience with the dead myself.

In the end I just don't know what death is. It is a mystery and an unknown and the big challenge for me is to accept not knowing and to prepare for this great transition in which the identity that I have known will go. I feel I

need to learn to humbly bow and surrender. The non-dual teachings have been very helpful in this respect by training me in the art of letting go, and to attain a sense of peace about surrendering myself. A trust that there need be no fear attached to this totally natural process. My body is aging, my health is fragile and there has been a constant letting go happening already as if in preparation for the final moment of this life.

We all live next to a vast ocean, just as Eunice did, and one day we will enter it fully. For now we can only make guesses at what that will be like and find our inner peace with not-knowing and trust in the wisdom of nature which beckons us to surrender.

Silent Life

— SUFI INAYAT KHAN



When we look at the universe, we find that there are two aspects of existence: firstly, life, secondly the condition, which compared with what we call life seems to be lifeless. The one aspect of existence we call life, the other we overlook.

We say that an object is alive when it shows some activity and consciousness.

Rumi's Masnavi tells us the experience of consciousness from mineral up to the plant:

*I died as a mineral, and rose a plant,
I died as a plant, and rose again as an animal,
I died as an animal, and rose a man.
Why then should I fear to become less by dying?*

*I shall die once again as a man,
To rise an angel, perfect from head to foot,
Again, when I suffer dissolution as an angel,
I shall become what passes the conception of man.*

Science today stops at man, but the poem says I shall ascend to that stage of being which passes man's comprehension.

What we learn from this is that every activity which we call "life" has sprung from a source that is silent and will always be silent; and every activity is still the activity of a tiny part of that life which is as wide as the ocean. Call it world, universe, nation, community, one individual, or only a particle or an atom—its activity, its energy springs in each case from one inseparable and eternal silent aspect of life. It has not only sprung from it, but it also resolves itself into it.

Therefore sages, mystics and philosophers who have probed into the depths of life have seen that what we call life is death, and that what we call no life is the real life.

The purpose of concentration, contemplation, meditation is nothing but this one thing: to attain to that depth which is the root of our life.

The bliss found in solitude is hidden within every human being; in mystical words, it is called the all-pervading light. Light is the source and origin of every human soul, of every mind.

Although there are many things in life, which I need and for which I shall work, yet there is only one thing around which life centers that will satisfy me: spiritual attainment. This realm is the silent life; the life inseparable, eternal, self-sufficient, and all-powerful. This is the life of the wise, the life, which the wise contemplate. It is the face of this life that they long to see; it is the ocean of this life that they long to swim in.

These are the ones who are really happy, who are above all unhappiness, above death and the destruction of life.

- ❖ All that lives is spirit and all that dies is matter.
- ❖ The seeming death is the real birth of the soul.
- ❖ Life is captivity from which death is the release.
- ❖ Death is a tax the soul has to pay for having had a name and a form.
- ❖ Life is progress and ceasing to progress is death.
- ❖ Every moment of your life is more valuable than anything else in the world.



dear spirits

I don't believe they have left us
 those with whom we still talk
 in our heads our dreams

I don't believe I will be alone
 abandoned when I die
 the dear departed ones
 hold out their hands in welcome

even if nothing leads to nothing
 except cold darkness
 they are there
 waiting for me
 their songs fill me
 and I feel held held held

I don't believe I need to believe
 in anything else
 this is
 more than enough

you
 dear spirits
 leave notes in rosebuds
 songs in the wind
 paths through the evening garden

it is enough
 as long as memory

— Jeanne Rana
 June 2, 2015



Point of View

Death.

I think about it a lot, perhaps because of being in
 the seventh decade of life—fewer moments left
 ahead than behind.

We consider death a mystery, and yet it is present
 with us every moment as a thought or feeling,
 sensation, or perception—or the moment itself—
 arrives and passes away. There is no life without
 death.

I soak in the hot tub with my head propped on the
 edge, taking note of the waxing moon's angle, the
 placement of the few constellations I recognize.
 Then noticing turns inward, resting as unchanging
 awareness that has no opinions, no voice, no
 beginning or end—wide awake, alive emptiness.

When death arrives, that ground of awareness will
 remain just as it is, untouched, eternal and infinite.
 What leaves is the point of view, nothing more.

— Amrita Skye Blaine



Death in the Desert

Shards of gold and indigo streak across the sky,
as earth moves to the edge
of darkness to light;
the invisible once more becoming visible
as I take leave of my dear ones
and walk into the rocky red landscape.

Carefully placing my sleeping bag
under the juniper and pine bushes;
aligning myself south to north
I bury down
deep into the soft warm earth
of this ancient landscape.

For three days
while the raven caws overhead,
this animal body of mine purges itself,
until body emptied, mind fragmented,
unable to move or cry
and in the blackness of night, I wait for oblivion.

Later, the vast emptiness of darkness
gathers me gently in her arms.
Horizons disappear,
and no longer bound, I melt
into the soft spaciousness
of this warm starry night.

Then from the east,
early morning sun arises again;
golden rays pierce my forehead
and vibrate into my deepest being.
Dissolving in a lucid radiance
I am dying—before I die.

—Celia Snow
July 2015





Death Poems 2014

before high tide
gone gone gone

I will miss
your warm body
your dark eyes

a hole in the sky
where the branch flowered
all the birds confused

what words
this one last time
before my alphabet shatters?

where is my purse?
she kept saying
now I understand

what sunset
if I don't see it?
what full moon path across the water?

Ferryman Ferryman
carry me home
goodbye my darlings

gone fishing
forever
without a pole

no regrets
no words for
this blank page

joining the billions
gone before
any time now

please
scatter my ashes
with yours

glad for this last dawn
damn the torpedoes
full speed ahead

what to do
with all the poems?
once I'm gone they're yours

Last thought:
this was NOT
on my bucket list

birth copulation and death
looks like three out of three
for me

how will I feel tomorrow?
I'll never
tell

— Jeanne Rana
June 29, 2014

Meeting Each Other

With each issue of Fresh Rain we will include a few short biographical sketches and photos of Sufi Way initiates. Since many of us are scattered in different places on the globe, this is one way we can introduce ourselves to each other—along with speaking together

on teleconferences or, if we're lucky, meeting each other at a program or retreat. If you would like to introduce yourself like this, send a photo and a 200-word (or less) bio written in the first person to: freshrain@sufiway.org



Basheera Ritchie

Hello. My name is Basheera.

I've been a seeker after "Realization" my entire life. In my late teens, I knew I'd need to find a teacher who gives prominence to that ideal. I discovered the Ruhaniat—a group

that was very active on the West Coast and in my town of Eugene, Oregon.

For thirty years, I practiced diligently. I went to college, got married, raised two daughters, and worked full time. I attended and taught Sufi classes, was a zikr leader, became an initiator and had students of my own. The event closest to my heart was NW Sufi Camp. One year, I was asked to be the Director. I was interested in Pir Elias. He was doing great work in the realm of Brotherhood/Sisterhood work, and I thought it would be exciting to meet our Sufi Way cousins.

Pir Elias graciously accepted my offer to be the featured teacher at our camp, along with Rabia, his wife.

One day, while I was at work evaluating a long and tedious document, I took a break to look out into the winter sunshine and...suddenly... Realization struck!

Soon after, my marriage abruptly came to an end and I was completely unmoored. A few months later, NW Sufi Camp convened with Pir Elias and Rabia. It became obvious Elias' true passion was to serve as a guide to Awakening. Right when I needed it the most, the teacher had appeared.

I lost my job in the recession. I met Don and moved to Portland. I hardly recognized myself. I was practicing with a different order of Sufis, living in a different town and with a different man.

In 2012, I opened Medley, a tea house and café in SW Portland. Now, Medley is profitable and Don and I are happily married. I regret I am currently unable to devote time to Open Path activities. I believe my adventures as a small business owner will inform me well if, in the future, I am able to serve as a guide.

It has been like drinking from a fire hose, as I learn to respond from a non-dual perspective to a maelstrom of competing stimuli. I look forward to meeting you when I someday emerge!

Upcoming Programs 2016



Living Sufism

The 2015-16 Living Sufism teleconference series will begin in early October, 2015. Notification of the 2015-16 schedule will be sent to everyone on our mailing list.



Open Path Intensive Retreat

(Full; waiting list only)
Two-week intensive retreat
Nada Hermitage, Crestone, Colorado
May 5 – 19, 2016



A Joyous Cosmology

3-day Advanced Open Path Retreat
Whidbey Island, Washington
January 22 – 24, 2016



A Joyous Cosmology

4-day Advanced Open Path Retreat
Himmelreich Retreat Center, Lindau, Germany
June 30 – July 3, 2016



2016 9-Month Open Path Training — Austria

An in-depth training to introduce you to the direct experience of pure awareness
Starting March 2016



A Joyous Cosmology

4-day Advanced Open Path Retreat
Sparjeburd Retreat Center, Heerenveen, Netherlands
October 20 – 23, 2016



A Joyous Cosmology

4-day Advanced Open Path Retreat
Croydon Hall, Somerset, United Kingdom
March 17 – 20, 2016