The Edge of Life

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Toward the One, the perfection of love, harmony and beauty, the only being; united with all the illuminated souls who form the embodiment of the Master, the spirit of guidance.

We aspire to support the awakening of hearts and the relieving of suffering, helping human beings unfold their soul’s purpose and live harmoniously.

The Sufi Ruhaniat International was founded by Murshid Samuel L. Lewis shortly before he died in 1971. We are in the stream of the ages-old wisdom lineage of Sufism brought to the West in 1910 by Hazrat Pir-o-Murshid Hazrat Inayat Khan, 1882-1927, under the title “The Sufi Message of Spiritual Liberty,” and his disciple Hazrat Pir-o-Murshid Samuel L. Lewis (Sufi Ahmed Murad Chisti). This work was continued by Hazrat Pir Moineddin Jablonski, the spiritual successor of Murshid Samuel Lewis, who guided the Ruhaniat from 1971 until his death in 2001. It continues today under the guidance of Pir Shabda Kahn.

The Invocation of Hazrat Inayat Khan reads:

Toward the One, the perfection of love, harmony and beauty, the only being; united with all the illuminated souls, who form the embodiment of the master, the spirit of guidance.

With this invocation, we affirm our desire for unity of heart with all spiritual seekers on all paths toward God. Celebrating diversity within unity, we affirm our unique heritage and universal spiritual transmission through the life and work of Sufi Ahmed Murad Chisti. This connects us principally to the Sufi lineage of Hazrat Inayat Khan, but also many other illuminated souls, known and unknown to the world. This transmission includes blessing streams from Sufi Ahmed Murad Chisti’s many teachers, who include: Swami Papa Ramdas, Mother Krishnabai, Nyogen Senzaki, Sokian Sasaki, Sufi Barkat Ali, and Mata-ji Ruth St. Denis.

The Ruhaniat family is composed of sincere mureeds (formally initiated students) who tread the path of initiation and discipleship, seeking the truth of the inner life through personal practice and direct experience—just as the disciples of Christ, Buddha, the Divine Mother, Mohammed, and other illuminated souls, known and unknown, have done through the ages. Because Sufism is based on experiences and not on premises, we affirm the preciousness of an initiatic relationship of spiritual transmission between initiator and mureed. It is a fundamental principle of the Sufi Ruhaniat International that each mureed have an initiator to serve as friend, guide and reality check. This primary initiatic relationship provides a living matrix within which student as well as teacher may develop in character and spiritual experience.

Further activities of the Ruhaniat include an Esoteric Studies program, the International Network for the Dances of Universal Peace, the Dervish Healing Order, the Service of Universal Peace and ministerial training, Spiritual Psychology and Soulwork, Ziraat, and many other inspired teachings of the leaders and lineage holders of the Ruhaniat.

Many contemporary tools are available to help us in our personal and spiritual growth. At the same time, we represent a tradition that has its roots in prehistory. The sacred practices and teachings that have arisen from diverse climes and cultures have been carefully cultivated and prepared for us to be planted in the soil of today’s heart.

We aspire to serve humanity in experiencing love, harmony, and beauty, by embodying the unity of religious ideals, and by working for the awakening of humankind to the divine light and power that is the essence of every human being.

From Hazrat Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan

Objects of the movement: To establish a human unity with no consideration of caste, creed, race, nation, or religion. Differences produce disharmony and cause all miseries in the world.

To spread the wisdom of Sufis, which has been until now a hidden treasure, it being the property of humankind which does not belong to a certain race or religion.

To attain that perfection where mysticism remains no more a mystery, which relieves the disbeliever from ignorance and the believer from falling victim to hypocrisy.

From Hazrat Pir-o-Murshid Sufi Ahmed Murad Chisti (Murshid Samuel L. Lewis)

Our work is to spread the knowledge and love and light of God. By stressing the positive, the affirmative, the true, we help ourselves and all humanity.

From Hazrat Pir Moineddin Jablonski

Aspirations for those on the path: Deepen your compassion. Love the wounded places in you that need healing. Open yourself to the grace of illumination. Give freely of your joy. Share your neighbor’s burden. Through all these avenues, discover your Soul.

May all beings be well!
May all beings be happy!
Peace, Peace, Peace.
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Bismillah, er-Rahman er-Rahim — We begin in the name of Allah, who is mercy and compassion

Published twice a year, we present articles for and by our community and include inspiring thoughts from our heritage.
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I started a new job this year, working for Commonweal, an organization that—among other things—helps people and doctors work deeply and open-heartedly with death. Through events at Commonweal, I meet people who are literally facing their own mortality. It’s not uncommon to have a conversation with someone who is in a late stage cancer, whose eyes tell the story of the preciousness of every single moment. Sometimes, in those eyes, I see love and deep peace; sometimes I see hopelessness and fear.

We don’t need to be literally facing our mortality to feel love, peace, hopelessness or fear. It is all around and within us. Maybe it is because part of us knows that the minute we are born, we face—as one of our contributors this issue, Dr. Rachel Remen, calls it—the “Edge of Life.”

In permaculture, edges (the boundaries between elements in ecosystems) are known to be the most fertile places, filled with activity, life, and abundance. In this issue, we explore the fertility and potency that comes from acknowledging death, in ourselves, our loved ones, and our world.

Our Sufi community is rich with members working in and around this edge. So much gratitude and appreciation to Ram Dass, who contributed a powerful article never before published; to Dr. Rachel Remen for allowing us to re-publish material from her national bestseller My Grandfather’s Blessings: Stories of Strength, Refuge, and Belonging; to Sara Morgan for sharing an “edge of life” experience in her own life; to Bodhi Be for his Hawaiian perspective on life and death; to the Ken Botto Trust for the haunting cover image; and to Commonweal for their rich resources and insight about the importance of encouraging open dialogue about edge-of-life issues. And gratitude to all of you that work with these issues each day, bringing them into the light.

Many Blessings.

— Kyra Epstein, Editor
Chapter 1: Death

AKIBAT: We love our body so much and identify ourselves with it to such an extent that we are very unhappy to think that this body, which is so dear to us, will be some day be in the grave. No one likes to think that it will die and be destroyed.

TASAWWUF: Identification of self with the body is largely a habit. It is impressed upon us from infancy. When the infant cries the parent will offer it food. Often the child does cry for food, but it has other wants and longings. It offers no resistance to impression and so it comes to accept parents’ thoughts that its cries can be satisfied with food and material things.

From the metaphysical view, consciousness is infinitely greater than the body, the body being only a receptacle for life. The Scriptures teach that we live and move and have our being in God, and this life manifests through consciousness. The esoteric practices and disciplines of all religions tend to elevate the disciple above bodily consciousness. One does not neglect the body, nor cease to enjoy life through the body which is really the temple of God. The spiritual life may be fulfilled in the flesh and even by the flesh and through the flesh. Actually the body is being destroyed every minute. Every moment, every breath, every pulsation of the heart has its life and death, so to speak. But we are more aware of our impressions of breath and heartbeat than of breath and heartbeat themselves. If the body were our ultimate reality there would be resistance to destructive processes; or there would not be rebuilding going on at the same time.

The ego, or nafs, wishes to hold on to forms and appearances, to preserve everything in the state which it finds things.

AKIBAT: But the soul is our true self. It existed before our birth and will exist after our death.

TASAWWUF: In different religions there are different teachings about soul, but generally the term refers to the real self, the abiding personality. In Sufism the term is ruh which means also the activity of infinite light. In Hinduism the term purusha is used, which also means the essential personality which is beyond the phenomenal universe.

The general teaching is that this essence was created in God’s image and therefore cannot be subject to destruction. If it were subject to change and destruction it would not be in God’s image.

AKIBAT: That which holds the conception of “I,” a living entity, is not the body but the soul deluded by the body. The soul thinks that it is the body; it thinks that it walks, sits, lies down when the body does, but it does not really do any of these things. A little indisposition of the body makes it think, “I am ill.” A slight offence makes it dejected. A little praise makes it think itself in heaven. In reality it is not in heaven nor on earth; it is where it is.

TASAWWUF: This theme is continued in other writings of Hazrat Inayat Khan, especially in The Soul Whence and Whither and Metaphysics. The Gayan commences: “When a glimpse of Our Image is caught in man, when heaven and earth are sought in man, then what is there in the world that is not in man? If only one explores him, there is a lot in man.”

It cannot be emphasized too much that the soul is really the divine breath and that God alone exists.

The self is like a delusion due to the interposition of nafs, the seeming self which shuns peace. What is called “Islam” means the pacification of nafs so the man can live in, through, and with, ruh.

As soon as the intellect interposes there will be a doctrine and as soon as there is a doctrine there may be other doctrines and all of these belong to the mind-world, and are not the activities of soul itself. This interpretation of mind drags man away from identity with the body but does not lead to emancipation from nafs. In the Hebrew Bible, when Moses wanted to know the real name of God, he received the answer “Ani asher Ani” which usually translated as “I am that I am,” but it really means the eternal movement of the one and only being.

AKIBAT: The soul’s dwelling in the material body deludes it so much that it thinks, “I can live only on material food, can stand only on earth, can enjoy only material surroundings. Without these I am nowhere, I am nothing.”

TASAWWUF: This is the ego-delusion which sets up the supposition of selves which are independent of each other and of life as a whole. When this delusion
Remember friend, as you pass by, as you are now, so once was I.
As I am now, so you must be. Prepare yourself to follow me.
— Tombstone in Ashby, Massachusetts

Something has happened to me as a result of meandering through many realms of consciousness over the past 50 years that has changed my attitude toward death. A lot of the fear about death has gone from me. I am someone who actually delights in being with people as they are dying. It is such incredible grace for me. In the morning, if I know I am going to be with such a person, I get absolutely thrilled because I know I am going to have an opportunity to be in the presence of Truth.

It is now becoming acceptable in our culture for people to die. For many decades, death was kept behind closed doors. But now we are allowing it to come out into the open. Having grown up in this culture, the first few months I spent in India in the 1960s were quite an experience. There, when someone dies, the body is placed on a pallet, wrapped in a sheet, and carried through the streets to the burning grounds while a mantra is chanted. Death is out in the open for everyone to see. The body is right there. It isn’t in a box. It isn’t hidden. And because India is a culture of extended families, most people are dying at home. So most people, as they grow up, have been in the presence of someone dying. They haven’t walked away from it and hidden from it as we have in the West.

I was certainly one of the people in this culture who hid from death. But over the past few decades I have changed dramatically. The initial change came as a result of my experiences with psychedelic chemicals. I came into contact with a part of my being that I had not identified with in my adult life. I was a Western psychologist, a professor at Harvard, and a philosophical materialist. What I experienced through psychedelics was extremely confusing, because there was nothing in my background that prepared me to deal with another component of my being. Once I started to experience myself as a “Being of Consciousness” — rather than as a psychologist, or as a conglomerate of social roles, the experience profoundly changed the nature of my life. It changed who I thought I was.

Prior to my first experience with psychedelics, I had identified with that which dies—the ego. The ego is who I think I am. Now, I identify much more with who I really am—the Soul. As long as you identify with that which dies, there is always fear of death. What our ego fears is the cessation of its own existence. Although I didn’t know what form it would take after death, I realized that the essence of my Being—and the essence of my awareness—is beyond death.

The interesting thing to me at the time was that my first experience with psychedelics was absolutely indescribable. I had no concepts to apply to what I was finding in my own being. Then, Aldous Huxley gave me a copy of The Tibetan Book of the Dead. As I read it, I was amazed to find myself reading lucid, clearly articulated descriptions of the very experiences I was having with psychedelics. It was immensely confusing to me because The Tibetan Book of the Dead is 2,500 years old. I had thought, in 1961, that I was at the leading edge of the unknown. But here was an ancient text revealing that Tibetan Buddhists already knew—2,500 years ago—everything I had just learned.

The Tibetan Book of the Dead was used by Tibetan Buddhist lamas to read to fellow lamas, as they were dying and for 49 days after their death. Tim Leary, Ralph Metzner, and I began to see the book in metaphorical
terms as the story of psychological death and rebirth, even though it was originally intended as a guide through the process of physical death and rebirth. I now think that the idea of dying and being born into truth, or wisdom, or spirit, is really what our business is when we talk about death. When you extricate yourself from the solid identification with your body, you begin to have the spaciousness to allow for the possibility that death is a part of the process of life—rather than the end of life. I feel this very deeply.

People ask, “Do you believe that there is continuity after death?” And I say, “I don’t believe it. It just is.” That offends my scientific friends no end. But belief is something you hold on to with your intellect. My faith in the continuity of life has gone way beyond the intellect. Belief is a problem because it is rooted in the mind, and in the process of death, the mind crumbles. Faith, consciousness, and awareness all exist beyond the thinking mind.

I have a friend named Emmanuel. Some of you have met him through his books. He is a spook, a being of Light that has dropped his body. Emmanuel shares a lot of great wisdom. He is like an uncle to me. I once said to him, “Emmanuel, I often deal with the fear of death in this culture. What should I tell people about dying?” And Emmanuel said, “Tell them it’s absolutely SAFE!” He said, “It’s like taking off a tight shoe.”

In the past, what I endeavored to do in partnership with Stephen and Ondrea Levine, Dale Borglum, and Bodhi Be is to create spaciousness around death. We had different programs like the Dying Hot Line on which people could call and have a kind of pillow talk with people who would help them stay conscious through the process of dying. We also—back in the early Eighties—had a Dying Center in New Mexico. My model was that I knew being with people who were dying would help me deal with my own fear of death in this lifetime.

In the Theravadan Buddhist traditions, they send monks out to spend the night in the cemetery, where the bodies are thrown out, uncovered, for the birds to eat. So the monks sit with the bloated, fly-infested corpses, and the skeletons, and they get an opportunity to be fully aware of all of the processes of nature. They have the opportunity to watch their own disgust and loathing and their fear. They have a chance to see the horrible Truth of what “as I am now so you must be” really means. Seeing the way the body decays, and meditating on the decay, opens you to the awareness that there is a place in you that has nothing to do with the body—or the decay.

That combination led me, as early as 1963, to start to work with dying people and to be available to them. I am not a medical doctor. I’m not a nurse. I’m not a lawyer. I’m not an ordained priest. But what I can offer to another human being is the presence of a sacred, spacious environment. And I can offer them love. In that loving spaciousness they have the opportunity to die as they need to die.

I have no moral right to define how another person should die. Each individual has his or her own karma—their own stuff to work out. It is not my job to say, “You should die beautifully,” or “You should die this way or that way.” I have no idea how another person should die.

When my biological mother was dying in a hospital in Boston back in 1966, I would watch all the people come into her room. All of the doctors and relatives would say, “You are looking better, you are doing well.” And then they would go out of the room and say, “She won’t last a week.” I thought how bizarre it was that a human being could be going through one of the most profound transitions in their life and have everyone they know, love, and trust lying to them.
Restoring the World

The view from the edge of life is different and often much clearer than the way that most of us see things. Life-threatening illness may cause people to question what they have accepted as unchanging. Values that have been passed down in a family for generations may be recognized as inadequate; lifelong beliefs about personal capacities of what is important may prove to be mistaken. When life is stripped down to its very essentials, it is surprising how simple things become. Fewer and fewer things matter and those that matter, matter a great deal more. As a doctor to people with cancer, I have walked the beach at the edge of life picking up this wisdom like shells.

One of my patients who survived three major surgeries in five weeks described himself as “born again.” When I asked him about this, he told me that his experience had challenged all of his ideas about life. Everything he had thought true had turned out to be merely belief and had not withstood the terrible events of recent weeks. He was stripped of all that he knew and left only with the unshakable conviction that life itself was holy. This insight in its insularity and simplicity had sustained him better than the multiple, complex system of beliefs and values that had been the foundation of his life up until this time. It upheld him like stone and upholds him still because it has been tested by fire. At the depths of the most unimaginable vulnerability, he has discovered that we live not by choice but by grace. And that life itself is a blessing.

Some of those who have had a near-death experience, who have actually set foot over that edge and then returned, have had an additional insight. Their experience has revealed to them that every life serves a single purpose. We are here to grow in wisdom and to learn to love better. Despite the countless and diverse ways we live our lives, every life is a spiritual path, and all life has a spiritual agenda.

Such ideas have the power to change the way you see yourself and the world.

In the sixteenth century the great Kabbalistic Rabbi Isaac Luria offered a profoundly beautiful cosmology of the world, a sort of mystical version of the Big Bang theory. In the beginning there is the Ein Sof, pure Being without manifestation, the infinite, absolute Source of the world. The world as we know it begins with the Or Ein Sof, an emanation of light from the Source. Rabbi Luria explains the fragmented nature of this world by postulating an accident of cosmic proportions: the vessel holding the Or Ein Sof shattered and broke open, and the light of God was scattered throughout the universe into an infinite number of holy sparks. These countless sparks of holiness are hidden deep in everyone and everything.

Like many other mystical cosmologies, this creation myth is based on an idea of service. The purpose of human life is to uncover these sparks of light and restore the world to its original wholeness. Everyone and everything we encounter is a shell or container for a hidden spark of holiness. It is up to us to help free the hidden holiness in everything and everyone.

We restore the holiness of the world through our loving kindness and compassion. Everyone participates. It is a collective task. Every act of loving kindness, no matter how great or small, repairs the world. All those ever born have shared this collective work since the beginning of time.

The name Kabbalah uses for this collective work is Tikkan Olam, we repair and restore the world. Everything in life presents us with this opportunity. It invests all our struggles with a deeper meaning and deepens all our joy.

In talking of a particularly dark time in her life, a friend once told me that in the depths of her alcoholism a thought had occurred to her and proved a turning point. What if her struggle to find a way to live beyond her addiction had a deeper meaning? She had been living in darkness for many years. What if she was the only person in the world who could redeem the

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Excerpts from

My Grandfather’s Blessings

Stories of Strength, Refuge, and Belonging

by Rachel Naomi Remen, MD

My Grandfather’s Blessings

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goodness in this particular piece of darkness? This task might be hers alone. In some larger, more mysterious sense it might be her life’s service. This thought had lifted her sense of guilt and shame and dignified her struggle. It had given her a power she had not been able to find elsewhere. She wonders now if everyone’s struggle to overcome whatever diminishes them and live whole has this same meaning.

Tikkun Olam points to the value of every life. My grandfather explained this to me when I was very small. “We need to remember to bless the life around us and within us, Neshume-le,” he would tell me. “When we bless others, we free the goodness in them and in ourselves. When we bless life, we restore the world.” My parents, as socialists, believed in working for the common good. But my grandfather taught me that we bless life because it is holy and because we are holy as well.

It often seems that the problems in the world are large and overwhelming and there are limits to what we can accomplish as a single person or even as a single group. It can be profoundly disheartening. But Tikkun Olam means that we each make a difference and we can heal the world.

Service is the work of the soul. We might view moments of genuine service as a movement toward the soul, a return to what is most genuine and real in each of us. In the trajectory of a lifetime, this turning toward our goodness happens not once but many times. Some of these turnings are small and some are large. All are important. Much in life distracts us from our true nature, captures the Self in bonds of greed, desire, numbness, and unconsciousness. But every act of service is an evidence that the soul is stronger than all that and can draw us toward it despite all.

Perhaps our greatest service is simply to find ways to strengthen and live closer to our goodness. This is far from easy. It requires an everyday attention, an awareness of all that diminishes us, distracts us, and causes us to forget who we are. But every act of service bears witness to the possibility of freedom for us all. And every time anyone becomes more transparent to the light in them, they will restore the light in the world.

Being Fed

“I’ve been invited to a luncheon in San Francisco for His Holiness the Dalai Lama,” my colleague said one morning. “Why don’t you come with me?” I hesitated, wondering if I really had the time. But here was a chance to be in the presence of someone who many believe to be enlightened, and enlightenment was something that I wondered about. I had met a few “enlightened” people over the years and had felt little difference between them and others. I had expected to feel some sort of difference, and this had troubled me. But here was another such opportunity. I decided to go.

The luncheon was held in one of San Francisco’s most exclusive hotels. Naively, I had imagined that 30 or 40 people would be there. But this was not the case. We were shown into a very large reception room crowded with many of San Francisco’s wealthiest and most politically powerful. Men whose suits cost thousands of dollars and women in fabulous designer dresses stood holding drinks and talking, waiting for the appearance of His Holiness.

It was not an easy gathering. The noise level was intense. One had the feeling that anyone speaking to you was looking over your shoulder to see if someone else more important was there with whom they could more profitably spend their time. It made me uncomfortable and shy. My colleague was equally ill at ease, and we had begun to move slowly toward the door when His Holiness arrived and began to greet people. A somewhat informal line organized itself, and by chance we found ourselves close to the head of it.

My colleague had brought with her three photographs of an inspired approach she has developed for working with people with cancer. She had hoped to show these to His Holiness and ask him a single question. These pictures were quite large and had been mounted on heavy poster board. She was carrying them in a string shopping bag, and, as the line advanced, she began to try to untangle them from the bag. In the press of the crowd, this was no simple matter. She was still struggling to free them when she found herself standing with His Holiness. With some difficulty she at last managed to extract them and let the string bag fall to the floor.

She spoke to His Holiness of this work and they looked at the pictures together. Standing behind her, I had a close view of the interaction. It was completely unhurried, as if they were alone in the room. As their conversation drew to a natural and gracious close, His Holiness smiled. And then he stooped and picked up the string bag at my colleague’s feet. In the most seamless way imaginable, he opened it and held it out to her so that she could easily replace the pictures in it.

It is not easy to say why this small gesture had such power. Thinking back on it later, I realized that few of the other men in the room might have done such a thing. But I do not think that is why I remember it.
Surrender 101

by Sara Morgan

At every step toward the final goal man will be asked for a sacrifice, and that sacrifice will be a greater and greater one as he continues on the path...

— Hazrat Inayat Khan

I climbed up into the frayed rickshaw seat. I think “rick” is short for “rickety,” which every one of these man-pedaled conveyances seemed to be. The sun was beginning to go down, and I had just come from hours at a gynecologist’s office in the urban heart of Lucknow, a large city in North Central India, where I was living. Even this well reputed woman MD’s office was nothing like any medical scene in the America I came from. There were cracks in some walls, a dank hollow sound as feet moved incessantly across cold, dirty-looking tile floors, and every square inch of space was crowded and chaotic with waiting patients, children, nurses, and even a few dogs. If two words could describe urban India, these were the two: crowded and chaotic—too many people and too little space.

My first radiology tests and blood work had been sent to this highly recommended doctor. I had gone alone to my appointment, a veteran at self-sufficiency.

I waited, amongst howling babies, endless chattering Hindi women and frantic nurses, for what seemed like way too long. At times the doctor would just sit down with some waiting woman and, apparently, as all was in Hindi, talk with her about her condition, right there in the waiting room. At one point she asked a nurse about me, (a Westerner sticks out like a rutabaga amongst orchids in this crowd), is given my chart, which she peruses quickly, says something ominous in Hindi, and then tells the nurse, “I’ll see her alone in my office.”

That didn’t mean immediately, it turned out. Nor did it mean my idea of alone. However, only three or four nurses incessantly talking, giggling, and bumping into each other felt like solitude after the waiting room. The woman doctor and I sat across from each other, our roles defined by a massive, imposing desk, as she began: “You have a large tumor and it must be removed immediately. It is veeery serious!”

“I want to go to America if I have to have surgery,” I replied, calmly, as if talking about plans for dinner....” I think I’d prefer the paneer curry tonight....” I didn’t yet realize that I had entered diagnostic shock.

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The doctor became visibly miffed. “Madam, we have very excellent surgery right here in Lucknow! You do not understand. If you do not have this tumor removed immediately I cannot guarantee your life for more than two weeks!” She slightly squealed, with the last syllables lyrically, but slightly hysterically rising in tone, the way they do when Indians speak English. I knew without thought that my life at that moment had changed, had entered into an unknown passageway. And I was just a rider, on a new journey, watching the sun set on all of my life up until then.

From the open rickshaw the red summer sunset of India was unfathomably beautiful. I can still see it in my mind’s eye. I knew I was going to have to leave my homeland, India, where I had been living for almost a year. The carriage swayed and lurched, the end-of-the-day traffic hurled noisily by on all sides, all of it as if through a strange grey veil. I knew without thought that my life at that moment had changed, beyond radically, had entered into an unknown passageway. And I was just a rider, on a new journey, watching the sun set on all of my life up until then. All I had to do was sit in the seat I was given. It was all I could do. Nothing was wrong, yet everything was changed. And I was in the hands of something beyond myself.

I asked, and She crammed. I knew I should not be alone any longer, so I had the driver drop me at the house of a group of women friends who lived nearby. I was greeted warmly and immediately. “I’ve got some intense news,” came falling out of my mouth, as I half fell to the ground.

Women, at least the ones I’ve been graced to know, are so wonderful in crisis. All of them gathered around me, stroking my hair, arms, and legs, as I shared my story, their physical contact and open hearts helping me thaw out from my numbed state. Their love was so present, their concern so genuine yet tranquil, meditators all, that I could let tears pool in my eyes and feeling return to my body. Prayers were spoken and breathed, generous offers of support given, even laughter, based on philosophic perspectives of life and death, trickled amongst us, and eventually plans, like clear guidance, began to form in my mind.

My health insurance company, into which I had paid, religiously, the high premiums of a self-employed psycho-therapist in private practice, had gone bankrupt. New Mexico, my home in the United States, was one of the poorer states in the Union. I knew, from my days working in social services, it was unlikely to have any provisions for the medical needs of uninsured adults. Nor was it known for the quality of its medical services. Clearly, I had to have the surgery somewhere else.

“Go to California, to your brother’s.” These words came, from a place deep inside me, but not from the me I knew but from that other, knowing place inside, and one that I would rely on again and again in the months and years to come. It was clear, unmistakable and imperative: the spirit of guidance. I followed it.

Getting out of India was not easy, to put it mildly. I had flown over on a one way ticket, ready to leave America ‘for good’ and to dedicate the rest of my life to my spiritual quest, or so I thought. But we are not really in charge of our lives and this is a lesson that India, the Land of Shiva, Destroyer of Illusion, will cram down our throats, if we are bold, or crazy enough, to dare to ask Her for transformation. I asked, and She crammed.

My credit card wouldn’t work when I tried to purchase a plane ticket. Undeterred, I tried to call friends in the States to wire a ticket to me. As I stood in an old wooden phone booth in a hotel lobby in Delhi, where I had gone to be ready to board the first available flight, a “mild” earthquake struck the city, causing the entire hotel to shake and shutter; all phone lines died instantly. Half dressed and panicked, people were streaming out of the hotel. All business was paralyzed in Delhi for days. No phone lines operating, I could do nothing.

Then all the airlines went on strike. “I am sorry Madam, no flights may be booked, in or out of Delhi at this time…” an officious agent would say to me, at every desk of every airline office I dragged myself to, day after rainy, monsoon-season day. Each day, one less of the 14 that I had been allotted to live by the gynecologist in Lucknow.

This kind of utter incapacitation, utter inability to make the world conform to our wants, may be almost inconceivable to anyone who has never travelled to a third-world country. We, the privileged American middle class, live in a bubble of delusion; it never occurs to us that we can’t, when the chips are down, get what we need.

But in Delhi, the chips were all down and I was getting nowhere, except perhaps closer to my death. As the days passed I became less and less sane. I began to scream at Sikh auto-rickshaw drivers when they tried, as they always do Westerners, to overcharge me. My attempts to meditate or pray were useless and hollow. Humbling. I was withdrawn and constantly exhausted.
Wondering, and Weaving Strands of “Blood and Light”

by Bodhi Be

We start with the strand called blood, the blood in our veins, the blood that brings life to the cells in our bodies, the blood we’ve inherited from our ancestors.

The Hawaiian language seems to speak directly to our connection to the ancestors.

The root word kua means the back, anatomically.

Kuamo’o means backbone, spine, road, and path.

The prefix kua refers to generations back — as in kuakahi, meaning three generations back, as great-grand-parent.

Iwikuamo’o means spine and backbone and also means the near and trusted relative of a chief.

Makua is a parent, or any relative of the parent’s generation, as uncle or aunt and also means the main stalk of a plant.

Ho’omakua means to grow into maturity.

Akua is a god, goddess, spirit, divine, supernatural. Aumakua is a family or personal god.

The Hawaiian people and their language are telling us that our ancestors, as well as the gods, are holding us up; they are the backbone of our lives. In some ways, every choice you have ever made in your entire life has brought you to this moment and place in your life. To this very WORD.

Then, recognizing that in some way, every choice made by your parents, grand-parents, great-grand-parents… and on, helped bring you to this moment and place in your life. Those choices have contributed to what is “holding you up.”

We stand, along with our children and grandchildren, at the leading edge of human life, of all the choices made by all our ancestors. Standing at this edge, we may look behind, and see them all lined up into the distance, smiling on us (hopefully).

The ancestors have placed a “sacred pipe,” a sacred responsibility, in our hands that is now in our safe-keeping. It comes with the realization of all that had to come before us, to set the table we sit at, and, too, the recognition that every choice we make plays a part in future generations.

Honoring our own human-ness, our blood, includes honoring the ancestors, and recognizing their presence in our life, the Hawaiian image of us carrying the bones of our ancestors on our backs. We proceed for their benefit as well as our own. We join them at our own death.

The ancestors live in us physically. Everything we eat is plant-based, growing from the soil of the earth. What is soil? Ground up rock, and….dead stuff. Dead plant material, dead animal remains, and yes, dead Uncle Bill.

Our blood is our physical heritage, our DNA, our family tree, where we have come from, and what we are made of. Of course, when we start to follow the “family tree” back, we may see a dilemma. My parents were born in New York, their parents in Eastern Europe. But where did those people originally come from? And where did those peoples’ people come from?

Well, that depends on which story you read. The one I read, that rings with truth, tells me we are made from star material and we came from the stars. One of the Hawaiian creation stories says the original Hawaiians came from the Pleiades.

In this strand, we will die and we don’t know when.

Photo: NamWizard, Flikr
It’s rare in life to be present for the passing of one’s spirit and the returning of one’s body to the hands of the Earth. During the week of October 2nd, such a gift was offered to a small handful of loved ones of Sheik Jamshed Ken Storer, a teacher within both the Sufi Movement and Sufi Ruhaniat, who passed away on Friday October 8th at 3:15 am in Portland, Oregon.

He was admitted to Providence Medical Hospital on Tuesday, September 27th for a biopsy. By Sunday, October 2nd, he was comfortable letting all those who loved or knew him that he had Stage 4 Lymphoma. It was that evening that all the mureeds received a phone call that he requested our presence for a zikr the next night.

As we began to trickle into the hallway at the hospital, we received updates about his health—the cancer had spread to his lungs; whether to do chemotherapy or not; when he might go home. Holding hands, we discussed logistics—there was a Helping Hands website set up; could folks sign up for some shifts; updates on family coming to town; getting important things from Breitenbush Hot Springs Retreat Center—his home in the woods for almost 35 years.

It was time to go in. Six of us stood intimately around the bed—Zahir, Mahbud, Yusuf, Talib, Bart, and Karim—hands held, resting in our teacher’s eyes.

He smiled as we walked in and let out one of his robust laughs that always has a snort-like flair at the end of it. He grabbed Zahir’s hand to the left and Talib’s hand to the right and began to softly say “Allah, Allah,” and the zikr began under the hospital’s soft fluorescent lights, the fall sun setting and hitting the hospital’s brick walls, painting the few clouds in the sky pink. Jamshed’s breath grew quieter as the zikr grew on, but his breath was still there. As we ended, he spoke.

“I will always be the teacher of your heart. I have loved you all and will always love you. Ours is no caravan of despair. Come, come again.”

When I arrived on Wednesday morning for the early shift, the cancer had progressed significantly. Jamshed was tired, but unable to sleep. During the morning together, I read from In the Garden by Murshid SAM, gave him water through a straw, and fed him ice to help his thirst.

Mid-morning, when the nurses had come and gone and it was quiet, he said, “I just want it to be quiet. It’s too loud.”

“What’s that Jamshed? You need quiet? I can sit peacefully on the other side of the curtain and give you some solace,” I said.

“No. I mean, my body,” he said. “It’s too loud. It’s too much to handle. I want to rise above it and just be quiet and at peace.”

That afternoon, Jamshed went back to his home at Breitenbush, having decided that his time on Mother Earth was ending and to give into dying gracefully. Arrangements had been made for hospice care at home, and we all prepared to show up, tend to our Beloved, and to bear witness to his transition. During the night, a friend with the Dances of Universal Peace called me and said she had been doing reiki on Jamshed and that he said to her clearly that he wanted singing and that he was moving very powerfully toward the light.

Over the next 24 hours, visitors ebbed and flowed. A zikr led by his dear friend Sheikha Majida Inayat

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Early on the morning of November 18th, 2010, Anna Armaiti (aka Cheryl Alekner) passed from this earth as a result of ovarian cancer. Anna was born in California but lived in Eugene, Oregon, for 17 years before her passing. Shortly after moving here she met her life partner, Ishaq Jud, a teacher in the local Sufi community. They shared their home, their passion for music, and their lives for 10 years before he died in 2006, of early-onset diabetes. His passing hit Anna hard and she never truly recovered. Three years after, she was diagnosed with stage 4 ovarian cancer. She spent much of the last 2 years of her life on that journey, though she continued to pursue active relationships with her friends and interests until her final days.

Anna was gifted in many ways: She had a beautiful voice, played the guitar and other instruments, and wrote many songs. Music brought her great joy and she greatly cherished her friendships among musicians. She was very artistic, creating beautiful work in many different mediums, among them photography, design-work on T-shirts and other articles, and painting. Her friends were avid purchasers of her design-work. She was also a gifted writer. She was a wonderful cook, an avid gardener, a cat lover, and a fashionista.

Anna was born in Decatur, Illinois, in 1955. She was named after a tugboat called the Cheryl Ann. Anna went by Cher, until switching to Ophidia, then to Anna. Early on her family moved to Napa, California, where she lived until she was in her 20s. Her mother tragically took her own life when Anna was in her early adulthood. Her father worked for Pacific Bell telephone until his retirement and still lives in northern California. In her mid-twenties she moved to Berkeley, California.

She worked for a while in the insurance industry doing accounting, and at the same time became a student of the feminist Goddess spirituality teacher, Vicki Noble. She was very involved in amateur herpetology, and at one point lived in a studio apartment in Berkeley with over 100 reptiles, including a 3-foot Savannah monitor lizard who lived in the bathroom, Marley the South African Burrowing Bullfrog, Ishi the iguana rock star, and several sweet boas.

She became a member of Berkeley’s hallowed Emerald Earth Laughing and Drumming Society, where Don met her in the late 1980s. She wrote chants and songs that have been sung by circles of women as far away as Chile, and her songs have been published in the compilation songbook Songs for Earthlings by her friend Jess Shoup. She performed as a sacred musician for numerous large group rituals in the San Francisco Bay Area including rituals with Riane Eisler and Starhawk.

In 1990 she and Don St.Clair were asked to do security for the now-legendary late ancient forest activist Judi Bari after a bomb was detonated in the car that Judi and activist Darryl Cherney were riding in on a tour to promote the 1990s Redwood Summer effort to preserve the last coastal old growth redwoods. She and Don performed with Darryl at the famed Ft. Bragg rally and were asked to go on the 1990 Earth First! Redwood Summer national road show. The album of beautiful original songs will be posted online free for all soon!

She and Don moved to Eugene in 1993, parting ways amicably a while later. Soon thereafter she met her beloved soulmate, Ishaq. While in Eugene, Anna joined several communities who will miss her wit and her wisdom. She was a long-term member of the Eugene Sufi community, Spirit Booth at the Country Fair, the Middle Eastern Dance Guild, and the local band, Americanistan. She had ties to the Native American community and to Ananda Marga, and studied Wiccan practices as well.

She considered Ishaq’s family to be her own and, indeed, at the time of her passing, Ishaq’s sister and her husband came to midwife her through the transition and to handle the care and dispersion of her worldly possessions.

She is survived by her two beloved cats, Akbar and Sequoyah. ☯
Can you hear the pain of that? No one could be straight with my mother because everyone was too frightened. Even the rabbi. Everyone. She and I talked about it and she said, “What do you think death is?” And I said, “I don’t know, Mother. But I look at you and you are my friend, and it looks like you are in a building that is burning down, but you are still here. I suspect when the building burns entirely, it will be gone, but you will still be here.” So my mother and I just met in that space.

With Phyllis, my stepmother, I was more open, and she could ask whatever she wanted to ask. I didn’t say, “Now let me instruct you about dying,” because she would not have accepted that. But then came the moment when she gave up, and she surrendered, and it was like watching an egg breaking and seeing a radiantly beautiful being emerge, and she was clear, and present, and joyful. It was a Beingness that she always at some level had known herself to be. But she had been too busy all her adult life to recognize it. Now she opened to this beautiful Being in the core of who she was, and she just basked in its radiance.

At that moment, she went into another plane of consciousness, where she and I were completely together, just being. The whole process of dying was just moments of phenomena that were occurring. But when she surrendered, she was no longer busy dying, she was just being . . . and dying was happening.

Right at the last moment, she said, “Richard, sit me up.” So I sat her up and put her legs over the edge of the bed. Her body was falling forward, so I put my hand on her chest and her body fell back. So I put my other hand on her back. Her head was lolling around, so I put my head against her head. We were just sitting there together. She took three breaths, three really deep breaths, and she left. Now, if you read The Tibetan Book of the Dead, you will see that the way conscious lamas leave their bodies is to sit up, take three deep breaths, and then leave.

So who was my step-mother? How did she know how to do that?

Ramana Maharshi was a great Indian saint. When he was dying of cancer, his devotees said, “Let’s treat it.” And Ramana Maharshi said, “No, it is time to drop this body.” His devotees started to cry. They begged him, “Bhagwan, don’t leave us, don’t leave us!” And he looked at them with confusion and said, “Don’t be silly. Where could I possibly go?” You know, it’s almost like he was saying, “Don’t make such a fuss.

I thought how bizarre it was that a human being could be going through one of the most profound transitions in their life and have everyone they know, love, and trust lying to them.

—Ram Dass

These bodies we live in, and the ego that identifies with it, are just like the old family car. They are functional entities in which our Soul travels through our incarnation. But when they are used up, they die. The most graceful thing to do is to just allow them to die peacefully and naturally—to “let go lightly.” Through it all, who we are is Soul . . . and when the body and the ego are gone, the Soul will live on, because the Soul is eternal. Eventually, in some incarnation, when we’ve finished our work, our Soul can merge back into the One . . . back into God . . . back into the Infinite.

Ram Dass, whose name means Servant of God, was originally known as Richard Alpert. Ram Dass received his Ph.D. in psychology from Stanford University, and has taught at Harvard, Stanford, and the University of California. He began his studies in consciousness research with Timothy Leary at Harvard University in the 1960s, and today is a respected spokesman on the integration of Western culture with Eastern philosophies.

Ram Dass’ connection with Sufis dates back to the 1960s, when he remembers dancing in Central Park with Sufi Sam (Marshid Samuel L. Lewis). Ram Dass was featured in the Ruhaniat film, Sunseed, and he served on the board of Omega Institute with Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan.

In 1973 he founded the Hanuman Foundation, which has nurtured projects designed to increase spiritual consciousness in the West. He is also a founding member of the Seva Foundation, a nonprofit organization devoted to compassionate action. Today on Maui, Ram Dass is on the board of Bodhi Be’s Doorway Into Light initiative.

Ram Dass is the author of the landmark books Be Here Now!, Grist for the Mill (with Stephen Levine), and How Can I Help? (with Paul Gorman). 80

For more information:

Ram Dass’ website: www.ramdass.org
Hanuman Foundation: http://hanumanfdn.org
SEVA Foundation: www.seva.org
It was not so much what His Holiness had done but the way in which he had done it. In this tiny interaction I felt something purely joyful in him go forward to meet with her in the problem. In that moment getting three large, stiff pictures into a flexible string bag was not her problem or his. It was not even a problem. It was an opportunity to meet. Of all those in the world who could have picked up a string bag and held it out, I doubt anyone else could have done it in quite this way. For some inexplicable reason, a place in me that has felt alone and abandoned for all of my life felt deeply comforted, and I had a wildly irrational thought: “This is my friend.” In that moment it seemed absolutely true. It still does.

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Rachel Naomi Remen is one of the earliest pioneers in the mind/body holistic health movement and the first to recognize the role of the spirit in health and the recovery from illness. She is co-founder and medical director of the Commonweal Cancer Help Program featured in the Bill Moyers PBS series, Healing and the Mind.

Dr. Remen is Clinical Professor of Family and Community Medicine at the UCSF School of Medicine and director of the innovative UCSF course “The Healer’s Art,” which was featured in US News & World Report. Developed 20 years ago, The Healer’s Art has been taken by 30,000 medical students and is taught by medical faculty in more than half of American medical schools and in medical schools in seven other countries. She is also founder and director of the Institute for the Study of Health and Illness, a 20-year-old professional development program for graduate physicians.

She is the author of the New York Times bestseller Kitchen Table Wisdom: Stories That Heal and her newest book, My Grandfather’s Blessings: Stories of Strength, Refuge and Belonging. Her books have been translated into 21 languages.

Dr. Remen has a 57-year personal history of Crohn’s disease and her work is a unique blend of the viewpoint of physician and patient.

Click here to listen to Rachel’s End of Life Conversation at The New School at Commonweal September 2010

Find out more about Dr. Remen’s work: www.ishiprograms.org

I had declined the loving offers of Lucknow friends to accompany me there, in my still existing “I can do it by myself” and “I don’t want to trouble anyone” identities, or, rather, shields against vulnerability. I was utterly alone in a huge foreign city that spoke strange languages I did not. I felt ill and weak. The rain by now was becoming an unrelenting torrent, and everything was constantly damp, dreary, and endlessly lonely. I had moved to an ashram, of Sri Aurobindo, where there was a reasonably priced guest house, as my unexpectedly long stay in Delhi was getting expensive, and I needed the protection of a sanctified atmosphere.

I now had 7 days “left” and still no plane ticket. Alone in my stark, cement-walled ashram room, I finally surrendered trying. I gave up. Eventually perhaps we all reach the gift of absolute giving up. If we are lucky, we get to practice it, again and again. In the wisdom traditions it is part of what prayer is about. Muslims put their heads to the ground in submission, five times every day. Tibetans prostrate flat out on the floor, at least 300,000 times per lifetime.

I had bowed and prostrated before, but never like this. My giving up and giving over my very life, was beyond anything I had ever known. Full out on the cold damp concrete floor, I cried out to God, to do with me as He wished. “Clearly I’m pushing the river,” I sobbed. “I give up. I’ll have the surgery here. Or die here. Just do with me what You want. I GIVE UP. I give You my life.”

And I did. I disappeared some way that day; some deluded way of being died in me that morning. And something softer, more pliant, more humble took its place.

Within two days every cloud lifted, every obstacle dissolved, and I was on an airplane headed for San Francisco, with surgery two days later. The details contain more amazing stories, but the moment of utter surrender is what matters. There are always stories.

Spent, an absolute emotional wreck, I would have done it all again, for the grace of that Holy Surrender.

Sara Morgan spent 10 years pilgrimaging through three cancers, a terminal diagnosis, 14 surgeries, chemotherapies, radiation, and nuclear medicine, to emerge well and eternally grateful in 2006. She now considers cancer to be one of her most powerful gurus. This story marks the beginning of that journey.
How, and if, we use this information makes a big difference in how we embrace and live a whole life.

Adding the mystical view, we turn to the second strand, the light, manifesting in us as soul, awareness, presence, emptiness, *atman*, etc.

We don’t actually have a soul. A soul has us, and is not limited by this one incarnation. It may have chosen this body, these parents, the place and time we were born, etc., to continue its journey of experience. Sometimes it only needs a short time in a body to complete its work this time around.

In our willingness and ability to choose to turn and tune to the soul, we recognize ourselves as something more than this body and its sensations and experiences. We recognize our true nature as the expression and manifestation of pure awareness, spiritual essence, the all being-ness, coming into wakefulness through us. Our soul points us to the truth that we are neither body, thoughts, or individual soul.

In this strand, every incarnation this soul has ever had has led to this very moment, to this very incarnation. Not necessarily “we” having these incarnations, for there may not be any continuity of a “we” that accompanies these incarnations.

In this strand, we were never born and will never die.

Now you and I can start to weave, and ask the BIG questions together, for how we weave the “blood, individuated self” and the “light, the essence of all” is what gives purpose and meaning and “holiness” to life.

How do we live a sacred life, where spirit expresses as soul, and manifests through personality? Is that not the essence of the Sufi teachings of Inayat Khan—a life of freedom, unconditional love, and presence, in service to all that has come before, and all yet to be?

And how do we live this sacred life, without denying our humanity, our blood, where suffering, loss, tragedy, pain and injustice, live side by side with so much beauty and kindness?

Where we don’t employ “spiritual over-ride,” full of bumper-sticker homilies, to mask our own suffering, loneliness and fear. Where we don’t lose track of the ancestors and the sacred responsibility we carry. Where we recognize that everything about our human-ness itself, emanates from the sacred, and we fully own what we have pushed away, having judged it “un-spiritual.” Where learning to live with a broken heart may be understood as holy work.

And too, where we don’t get lost in only seeing the blood, the roles, the identities, the self-judgments, and that which comes from identifying as someone separate from the whole.

We die, and we don’t die. Our death has meaning, purpose and consequence. Death is an initiation, maybe the first one of this lifetime, for dying is something we do, not something that happens to us.

How we die, and how we attend to our dying friends and family, is critical to how a community grows, to the life itself, of the community.

How we die is a “village-making” event. And we do this by weaving together these strands, and more, including a large dose of “don’t know” in reverence to this Great Mystery that lays beyond our concepts.

For whatever these strands inform you about life after death, it may be more important to consider how you are informed about life before death.

Was there purpose and meaning, was there so much self-acceptance that the presence of love was tangible? Was there a life that added value to the community?

When we have entered so fully into our life, embracing the truth of our human-ness, as well as the truth of our divinity, the signs of our approaching death will not come as a shock.

And we will die just as we have lived.

Rev. Bodhi Be is a sheikh and cherag in the Sufi Ruhaniat International. He is a hospice volunteer, funeral director and the executive director of Doorway Into Light, a non-profit organization (a Ruhaniat affiliated center) in the field of death and dying and the transformation of human consciousness. He lives on Maui with his wife, Leilah, where they are off-the-grid organic homesteaders.

For more information: [http://doorwayintolight.org/](http://doorwayintolight.org/)
was held with close friends at 7 pm Thursday night. Jamshed was dressed in his yellow shroud with his beads around his neck, and as the zikr increased, we wept and sang and a vision of Jamshed came to me: he was there, passing through the gate. Pir Moineddin Jablonski, Hazrat Inayat Khan and Murshid SAM were all there, smiling, hands reaching out, welcoming him. That night, I sang to him several songs from the Dances of Universal Peace that he so gracefully and joyfully led at “the Bush” and said goodbye.

At 3 am, my husband tells me that I awoke, held his hand and spoke, “shh... he’s speaking to me. He’s leaving.” At 3:15 am, Jamshed passed away.

The next twenty-four hours were filled with details—preparing his body, transporting him in a caravan down to Breitenbush to bury him in the green burial he requested. Friends and family of Breitenbush created a pine coffin for him from felled trees that Friday morning, and dug a burial site by 5 pm that afternoon. The caravan arrived and in quiet and solace, we said our goodbyes, had a processional from his home to the burial site, candles held in front of us singing “Allah Ya Jamil.” His mureeds, good friends and son, Jared, used a mallet to close his coffin and lower him into the ground. And then it rained, all night, showering our Beloved.

The next day I awoke with the rain still falling softly outside. I wrote my fellow mureeds,

What glory you all contain to hold such sacred space and light for Jamshed during his passage: what love and service and humility you all contain for providing for him this week. It has been a gift and a blessing to watch you all give so selflessly and to know and understand life better through you. I am so honored to have been a part of this sacred container of light and love during this time.

Jamshed once said, “I know that the universe where we live is generous beyond measure, and sometimes we get in the way of that generosity.” During the week that he passed, there was a generosity, a gracefulness, and a light that we all lived within beyond measure. His passage put us on the edge of life, allowing us the gift to absorb his divinity as we sat by his side, cared for him, and buried him. His divinity now rests within us. O Inspiring Guide through life’s puzzling ways, in thee I feel abundance of blessing.

Jamshed Storer, our beloved friend and teacher, was born March 9, 1940, in Idaho Falls, Idaho, named Kenneth Mark Storer. Throughout his life he answered calls to ministry and compassion, including service as the founding minister of the Metropolitan Community Church of Boise, Idaho, and later as director of Shanti in Oregon, a direct AIDS service organization in the first fiery peak of the AIDS crisis in America. Then in 1988, he joined both the Breitenbush and Radical Faerie communities, and took hand with his beloved teacher Murshida Rabia Ana Perez-Chisti, who initiated him within both the Sufi Ruhaniat and Sufi Movement. For the rest of his life, he consciously carried this bridge into his own teaching through his deep friendship with both his teacher and his inspiring guide and spiritual friend Pir Shabda Khan.

Kari Lyons-Eubanks was initiated in the Sufi Ruhaniat International at the Northwest Sufi Camp in 2005 by Jamshed Ken Storer, and is a dance teacher in Portland, Oregon.
overcomes us, we are subject to constant growth, decay, and change and this is what makes death evident, momentarily or cyclically.

Spiritual training is for the purpose of emancipating one from these delusions and especially under the practice of ryazat, one first emphasizes and then comes to realize to a greater or lesser extent the universal life in which we live and which also penetrates us. Or as the Prophet said, “God is nearer than the neck-vein.”

Nimaz has the purpose of making man consider his smallness before divinity, his dependence on divinity, and then to actualize the divinity before whom he has been praying.

AKIBAT: There is a Persian saying: “Do not build a house on the ground of another.” This is what the soul does. Whatever it sees, the consciousness recognizes as itself. Its purity makes it reflect whatever is before it, and then it thinks, “This is I,” just as clear water reflects our image.

TASAWWUF: The soul really sees, and it has its own light with which to see. Without this light there would be no sight at all. In the Hindu Bhagavad Gita, it is taught that sight, seer, and seeing are the same and the same conclusion was reached by Sufis because they have gone through the same spiritual enlightenment. The purpose of spiritual practices is to take the disciple from darkness to the realization of this light.

Sufis also have practices called Murakkabah and Mushahhida which cover the same stages of unveiling, and by this one knows what is said in the teaching. The great Sheikh, al-Hujwiri, in his “Kashf al-Mahjub” also presents the teaching of unveiling.

AKIBAT: The soul then wants everything to be very nice and pleasant for its comfort and vanity. It wants to see its objective self well dressed; then it wants very good things about it. It sets up a good house, and all through this life it is in pursuit of these things.

TASAWWUF: The soul itself being perfect seeks perfection. The difficulty arises because it is deluded into looking into the world about one instead of looking into its very nature. The soul, being in the divine image, really has control of everything. In the delusion it does not know it. Beginning with the false satisfaction of the crying infant receiving food and attention and toys, so all through life one seeks food and attention and toys. Only they never completely satisfy.

Then sometimes people go into asceticism and deny themselves everything. They deny things but they do not deny the ego or nafs. The nafs then has its satisfaction in non-acquisition. Yet it has been taught that the creation was for the benefit of man and that from the light of man was this world made. So it is not wrong for the person to have food and comfort and clothes, but not to be possessed by possession.

The difficulty in the world is the blindness that has been produced because of the craving for things. With or without possession the craving goes on (Sanskrit Tanha). Feeling oneself incomplete the person seeks to possess power or fame or wealth, and these do not satisfy.

AKIBAT: Then when death comes this building raised on sand is blown away. Its collected property is taken from it. This is a very, very great disappointment.

TASAWWUF: Jesus Christ taught to work for possessions that are lasting, not the things of the world, but love and character and magnanimity and delight-in-God. This has been wrongly interpreted to seek to build in some heaven the same pride in possessions and ownership and fame and power. The Sufi therefore disengages himself from both these worlds, that of heaven and that of earth, to seek the bliss which is everlasting and yet can be enjoyed here and now.

There has been a cinema picture, You Can’t Take it With You, which had a temporary effect in making people accept that Jesus was right and the ways of the world are not right. But when the effects of that picture went away, the whole world continued in its rash madness for fame and power, and this not only produced the second world war, but has continued the unrest ever since. In our prayers, we ask for the Divine Grace and Glory and Wisdom and Joy and Peace which alone are endless.

AKIBAT: It loses all that it took interest in. Its withdrawing into its pure self, and the scattering of all earth’s deluding environment from its sight impresses it with the idea of death, to its greatest horror.

This horror and disappointment are the only death there is, for the body is nothing but a covering put over our soul, and when it is gone we are not dead; just as we do not think we are dead when our coat is worn out, or if someone tears our shirt.

TASAWWUF: Despite all the teachings of all prophets of God and the persistence of many holy men who have succeeded to the same functions earlier performed by Prophets, the whole world is caught in the delusion of seeking what is ephemeral. Not only was the possession of things useless, but much of the knowledge as well, including the ordinary religious knowledge which was supposed to help man live a proper life on earth. He found that no actions on earth by man of himself could predetermine the after-life.
Physicians of the Heart: Sufi Guidebook to the 99 Beautiful Names of Allah - Pre-Order Now!
Ya Rahman! Ya Rahim! Reciting and meditating upon the Qualities of Allah, the 99 Beautiful Names, is a central Sufi practice in our lineage -- opening the way to spiritual growth by way of attunement to the divine qualities already living in us. Murshid Wali Ali, Pir Shabda, Imam Bilal and Faisal Muqaddam and others have been meeting for the past several years to collaborate in the writing of a comprehensive guidebook to the Names, and completion is now in view. Find out more about the project and how to place an advance order for the special edition on the Ruhaniat Website.

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