



Raven's Bread

Food for Those in Solitude

Online Edition

February 2017

Thoughts In Solitude

Silence us for loving receptivity and response to all the ways God chooses to be manifest to us. But silence is also a loving attentiveness and receptivity to our own true selves. It takes quiet and silence to know one's own depths, to open the successive doors to the very center of our being, to our "heart" in biblical language. It may be a long journey, and it may take us years to get there, but isn't that what life is given to us for—to get to the Promised Land? And quiet and silence are our guides.

At the beginning of the journey I am preoccupied with myself at the most superficial level. I call it an ego trip in others and judge it there as terribly immature, shallow narcissism; but I don't even realize when I am in that state myself. If I go a little farther into my own consciousness, I begin to recognize the ego self, the superficial self, and all its games and subterfuges. I am invited to face my self-centeredness, the unworthy motivations and petty ambitions, the little meannesses, and all the rest of the trivial and sometimes nasty thoughts and reactions and schemes. When I am willing to open that door and take a good look, I recognize a kind of "slavery in Egypt", a mindless succumbing to forces that are not truly myself, because I do not want to pay the price of freedom.

One way to open the door and get a good look at that Egypt, at those rather unlovely selves in captivity, is to be silent enough to listen to our inner dialogue, our talk to ourselves. How often do I spend inordinate amounts of time and energy rationalizing my unpleasantness to others, or rashly imputing motives to others when I really know nothing about it, scheming how to get the attention or the affirmation I want, rehearsing old or recent hurts, thinking up the smart answer I wasn't sharp enough to give in a recent conversation, or gloating over a clever remark I did manage to get off, scheming how to get what I want even if I don't really need any of it?

Opening this door is not a pleasant experience; the key is silence, and I'd rather throw it away. I want to avoid at almost any cost a real look at that stratum of my being. And hence I want distraction, excitement, noise, anything to catch and divert me from facing the threatening desert within.

But, thank God, that level is not really the depth of ourselves. If I am true to authentic silence, even in that desert of my ego, if I accept the pain and radical honesty

about it and acknowledge my need, the silent God will open new depths. At first I may have only glimpses, but I come little by little—unless God chooses another timetable—to recognize my true self, that center of my being where the three-personed God indwells me as gift of baptism, where I am the image of the living, loving, creative God. I come more and more to want to live always at this heart of my being. Here I am quiet enough to hear the constant echoing of God's word and God's work, and to hear it deeply enough to let it shape me from inside out. This is no ego tripe but a coming out of Egypt to glimpse the Promised Land; this is a flowering of the desert.

Saint Ignatius of Antioch wrote that in his silence he heard the living water of baptism deep in his heart calling, "Come to the Father," and John of the Cross wrote, "The Father spoke one Word, which was his Son, and this Word he always speaks in eternal silence, and in silence must it be heard by the soul." Am I quiet enough, deep enough, silent enough to hear that living water, that one word, in my own heart?


There may be—indeed likely will be—reversions to the old unworthy inner preoccupations and dialogues, but we no longer have to look for escapes, diversions, rationalizations, excuses. We can afford now to face ourselves at that level and be honest with ourselves, and perhaps with another trusted companion on our spiritual journey. We can do so because we have seen enough to know who we really are and to accept ourselves because we know God does. We trust that the Lord is not finished with us yet and will bring us out of our ego desert into the full flowering of a God-centered life.

A person who has made this journey in the deep silence of receptivity and openness is the real inner-directed person, not only psychologically but wholly—from the heart. Such a person does not live out of compulsions any longer, but out of freedom.



Excerpted from:

Silence, Solitude, Simplicity
A Hermit's Love Affair with a Noisy, Crowded,
and Complicated World
By Sister Jeremy Hall, OSB



*A Word
From
Still Wood*

A death has literally befallen us at Still Wood and we are grieving. When we first moved here twenty-one years ago, we found a very young Frazer Fir planted near the house. It was not quite six feet tall and had originally been an indoor Christmas tree. Paul, especially, felt a kinship with it, as they could see “eye-to-eye” and both were new to this mountainside. Over the years it grew and grew and grew....sheltering nesting birds and scampering squirrels, producing wonderful cones, and being just picture-perfect all year round. Its shade became a favorite cool spot for our Border Collies in summer and our cats were frequently tempted to leap from the nearby deck rail into its branches in pursuit of anything skittering among them.

Our Friend was approaching forty feet when we noticed that it seemed less full, with more dead branches. A county extension agent explained that it was simply approaching the end of its life-cycle which is shorter at our elevation of 3600 feet. We were saddened but did not, could not cut it down. A long dry spell that loosened its roots followed by two days of high winds took any decision out of our hands.

One evening in late December Paul drove in and noticed a strange “openness” near the house. Our Friend no longer loomed over the drive—all Paul could see was a root ball sticking up near the edge of the lower bank. Sprawled down its bushy slope lay forty feet of evergreen which had landed so softly that Karen, in the house, had not even heard it fall.

Something which has been an integral part of the landscape surrounding us is no more. From now on, photos of our home will be different. We are faced with questions of whether to replace it (how could one?) or use its former space for something quite different: flowerbed, maybe roses.

With no intent to trivialize its gravity, we can't avoid comparing our small personal loss of a familiar landmark with the disturbing new landscape of our country that has emerged with the new year. We were blithely unaware of how truly fragile is the root system of our Great Democracy. How unproductive many parts of our country have grown; how the changes in the political climate have affected the lives of so many people. We face a new world order both at home and abroad, with all the uncertainties and anxieties such moments bring.

A Pulitzer Prize winning columnist has pointed out that some of the biggest world changes have evolved from a relatively small group situated at the right time and in the right place. Hermits can influence the percentage of good or evil, love or hate swirling through our world by being true to their beliefs. But we need to be clear about why we are living as we do. That is the purpose of last issue's Survey. Your response has been amazing, in both numbers and depth of insight. As we write this, responses are still arriving. God bless you, dear Ravens! Let us not lose heart but continue to plant the seeds of hope in a world in danger of dying from a drought of kindness or from the driving winds of hate.

*With our grateful love,
Karen & Paul*

Raven's Bread is a quarterly newsletter (FEB-MAY-AUG-NOV) for hermits and those interested in solitary life published by Paul and Karen Fredette. It affirms and encourages people living in solitude. As a collaborative effort, it is written for and by hermits themselves, delivered by postal mail or email. Please send your written contributions, address changes, and subscription donations to: pkfredette@frontier.com or *Raven's Bread Ministries*, 18065 NC 209 Hwy., Hot Springs, NC 28743 or via PayPal at our website.* Our phone number is: 828 622 3750.

An annual donation is appreciated, each giving according to their means. Please send payment in US dollars (PayPal converts foreign currency to US dollars). Anything extra goes into a fund to insure that all who want *Raven's Bread* can receive it.

***Raven's Bread* derives its name from the experience of the prophet Elijah in 1 Kings 17: 1-6, where a raven sent by God nourished him during his months of solitude at the Wadi Cherith (The Cutting Place).**

***Our website is :<http://www.ravensbreadministries.com> ; email: pkfredette@frontier.com and Blog for Lovers of Solitude: www.ravensbreadministries.com/blog.**

Senses

ONE AT A TIME TOGETHER

Each of us has a favorite sense— one of the five that provides us with a secret passageway of receptivity into the sacred. The two mottoes hanging in the music alcove of my hermitage identify mine: “God gave us music that we might pray without words,” and “Music, as the soul’s deepest language, is the speech of God.” Hearing is my favorite sense. The spiritual access for others might be sight— ranging from the lure of an unfolding sunrise to the gentle shading of a Renoir painting. For others, it is smell, with the fragrance of a flower able to coax the invisible into presence. For others, it is touch, as the tangible feel of another hand diffusing otherness into tenderness. For still others, there is ecstasy in the taste of wild strawberries with cream. We are blessed by poets who shape the words of our hearts, musicians who distinguish flowers by their songs, and woodworkers who thrill with the aroma of cedar.

In offering a course in worship, I once invited a ballet instructor to team-teach with me. Why not, for liturgy aches to be choreographed, its words a poetry shaped into gestures by the passion that induced David to dance naked before the Lord. During that semester, I began to sense how each of us not only has a master sense but also how our other senses form a hierarchical arrangement that forms a texture all its own.

I remember experiencing this one spring evening when I was failing magnificently in trying to master this activity called contemplation. I finally gave up. And without warning, I heard the silence speak, I was sitting by an open window when everything stopped. Wrapped in the hushed sounds of stillness, a warm breeze fondled my face with a hint of pine branch music. Cattle in the valley lowed the grace notes, the evening snuggled in for sleep and whip-poor-wills began cheering the moon in her levitation.

Contemplative silence is an invitation into this inexhaustible sensual beauty of attentive living—a child giggling for no clear reason, the soft touch of a kitten’s purring, a goblet of wine reflected by a crackling fire, the harmonics of a Bach fugue as the world’s invitation into dance. Life is not a course to be audited but an honors major to be chosen. “Praise the LORD!... Sun and moon...shining stars...fire and hail, snow and frost...mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars...creeping things and flying birds!” (Ps. 148:1-10) With senses teased into aliveness by the Holy Spirit, we can “taste and see that the LORD is good” (Ps. 34:8).

EXCERPTED FROM:

Becoming Who GOD Wants You to Be

by W. Paul Jones, Family Brother of Assumption Abbey and Director of the Hermitage Spiritual Retreat Center at Lake Pomme de Terre in Southern Missouri

I WANT

Unspoiled wilderness
Bees in ev'ry buttercup
My huge yellow nose

Almost welcoming
A cicada cantata
The cantaloupe patch

Lazy alligator
Basking in warm summer sun
Still blocking my view.

Three Haiku by Gale Marie Martin, Jeanerette, LA

I wanted to be a hermit and only hear the hymns of the earth,
And the laughter of the sky,
And the sweet gossip of the creatures on my limbs, the forests.

I wanted to be a hermit and not see another face
Look upon mine and tell me I was not all the beauty in this world.

For so many faces do that—cage us.

The wings we have are so fragile they can break
From just one word, or a glance devoid of love.

I wanted to live in that cloister of light's silence
Because, is it not true, the heart is so fragile and shy.
St. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380)



SOLITUDE AND INTIMACY



In silence and solitude we can deepen our intimacy with others. Through the self-discovery afforded by quiet alone-time, the quality of the intimacy in our lives evolves, becoming richer, deeper, more fulfilling. ... With a new outlook on intimate relationships—including our relationship with ourselves—we may find a new sense of closeness and connection with family, friends, and coworkers.

The cultivation of deep intimacy is one of the most sought-after goals in human life. Many believe that a yearning for closer connection is at the heart of what really motivates us, pushing us to know—and be known—more completely. According to Barbara Holland in *One's Company*, writer Don Marquis put the matter succinctly when he declared that “all religion, all life, all art, all expression come down to this: the effort of the human soul to break through its barriers of loneliness, of intolerable aloneness, and make some contact with another seeking soul.”

But what is deep intimacy? How can I become more intimate with another without losing intimacy with myself? How can I balance my need for independence with my need for closeness? These are important questions worthy of exploring during quiet alone-time, along with a more central query: “What does intimacy feel like?”

Let's define intimacy as a close relationship that resonates, for both individuals, from deep within, while at the same time affording each the willingness to be influenced, mirrored, or changed by the other's reality. A sense of enthusiasm and “full-aliveness” appears to derive from a rare and uncanny sense of being mutually in tune with one another. In such moments, we feel as though we *transcend* our differences with another person, while we also *assert* and *accept* those differences. Such an experience holds the potential for adding a new depth of intimacy to any relationship. One may ask, “What could possibly be more intimate and healing than to have a sense of abiding connection, of companionship, with another being that is based on exactly this kind of deep, mutually shared understanding, empathy, and collaboration?” The only plausible answer I can think of is, “Having that same level of intimacy with your self.”

Balancing intimacy and solitude within any relationship is not easy. It can be one of the most difficult tasks in an intimate bond between two people. Part of this has to do with the ambivalent or negative feelings

that may be directed toward the person who actively chooses to spend some quiet time alone. Despite our professed tolerance for individual expression and the celebration of personal freedom, there is a constant push toward conformity. Rocking the boat is not long tolerated by most passengers. The person who rebels or deviates may be labeled anti-social, eccentric, or downright hostile. Choosing to move away physically may be interpreted as a deliberate decision to separate emotionally, engendering feelings of rejection and devaluation, particularly in our relationship with an intimate companion.

The decision to take time in silence and solitude underscores the fact that there *are* limits to intimacy, that each one of us is, ultimately and irrevocably, alone in this world. Confronting this existential truth requires not only that we accept our inability to be “all things” even to those we love most, but that our first allegiance is to understanding (and following) our own route to happiness, which may sometimes exclude those with whom we feel the deepest love and greatest level of intimacy.

As we mature, many of us come to understand that the most satisfying intimate relationships, do not demand that we merge completely with another human—making of him or her the “be-all and end-all” of our existence—but that we establish an equilibrium between our simultaneous yearning for intimate connection and self-fulfilling independence. This acceptance of our simultaneous intertwining and separateness is part of what makes us fully human, able and willing to give to and receive from others in a loving and intimate way. Our embrace of silence and solitude—taking time to observe and accept our imperfections as well as our joys and successes—helps us welcome those same aspects of others through compassion and empathy that is born of self-love rather than a sense of obligation or duty.

The exploration of quiet alone-time opens the hearts of many people who let non-doing and stillness speak to them. Instead of evaluating their experience through intellect, they may consider other perspectives that are less “left-brain.” ... “*You will reach a point where the heart tells itself what to do.*” (Achaan Chah)

EXCERPTED FROM “*STILLNESS, DAILY GIFTS OF SOLITUDE*”

BY RICHARD MAHLER