



Raven's Bread

Food for Those in Solitude

Online Edition

August 2018

Thoughts In Solitude

"Am I doing it right?" I ask this question a lot, particularly in terms of the solitary life. Maybe it's because I don't have an official sanction to be a solitary, or because my life doesn't look particularly eremitic — I live with my wife in a house in the suburbs. Whatever the cause, I need a plumb line to help me assess my life in solitude.

Every time the question arises, my deepest self draws me to the image of anchorholds.

Many people know anchorholds as the type of cell that Julian of Norwich inhabited: typically a small room, built onto the side of a church, with three windows. Anchoresses (they were mostly women, and most numerous in medieval England) were walled into such a room upon becoming solitaries, committed to a cycle of prayer and contemplation that took up most of their days.

It is those three windows, and the interplay between them, that speak to me.

Take, for instance, the "squint" - a slit or side window that opened onto an altar in the church. Through it, the anchoress could take part in the Church's rituals directed to God, especially the Catholic Mass. The squint reminds me of our blessed capacity to connect with, and draw nourishment from, the Divine Source of all things (whatever name you use for that Source). The squint's size reminds me that a glimpse of the Divine is all we get. The vast Mystery is always utterly beyond us.

The "house window" usually opened onto servants' quarters. The servant would pass meals through the window to the anchoress; the anchoress would send her chamber pot the other way. So we have a whole window devoted to the most pedestrian details of life: eating and drinking and pooping. The house window reminds me that these too are part and parcel of our lives, not somehow separate or less than. For us suburban solitaries, even cleaning the house and mowing the lawn are part of our call.

Finally, members of the community would come

to the "parlor window" to receive counsel and wisdom from the anchoress. I look at this window and see my practice of spiritual direction, the correspondence from seekers in different places, my friends who need a listening ear. Yet curiously, the parlor window was to be smaller than the house window — a reminder that service to others, while important, is not everything.

At the center is the room that binds the windows together. In that room is the pulse of the anchoress's vocation — prayer and study and reflection and especially solitude. The solitude, and the Divine Spirit who moves within it, feed it all. The anchoress brings to each window the wisdom and treasures she has received in her anchorhold.

She also brings what she has experienced at the other windows. So her talk with a distressed parishioner goes with her to the squint, where she presents him to the Divine for mercy. The daily-ness of the house window gives her a keen sense of her own humanity, which she uses to stand in solidarity with supplicants at the parlor window.

Many times, when I ask myself whether I'm "doing it right", I worry that I've become too self-absorbed, or out of balance, or unproductive — or even too solitary. The anchorhold reminds me that the spiritual life is a never-ending flow, from the Divine to the daily to others to self to prayer and back again and over and over again. If I look at my life and see the flow, I can take heart that, in Julian's famous phrase, "*all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.*"

Written for Raven's Bread

By John Backman,

Spiritual director and author of

Why Can't we Talk?

***Christian Wisdom on Dialogue as a Habit of the Heart
(Skylight Paths)***



*A Word
From
Still Wood*

An article brought to our attention by a friend contained a reference that led us to a blog posted in 2012 by Kingsley Dennis, Ph.D. It was titled “The New Monastic Individuals” and made particular reference to “those people just going it alone, often ‘outside the box.’” Morris Berman calls these people the New Monastic Individuals (NMI), and Berman thinks this is where the future lies.”

We are inclined to agree with him. Such lifestyles often operate below the radar, “being authentic in activity rather than seeking visibility.” The more we read, the more we resonated with the writer’s thesis that “real change occurs (in social cycles) when the ‘anomalies’ - another word for the change agents—become too numerous to be absorbed into the incumbent system. That is why individuals and groups ‘doing their own thing’ are so important right now. All great ideas and innovations began life as ‘disruptive’ from the periphery, from outsiders.”

Immediately we saw the application to hermits and solitaries, as well as to those of us who live outwardly active lives but reserve precious time for solitude and prayer. He went on: “In times of transition (such as now), the monastic workers—or ‘disruptive innovators’, as they can be called—have greater potential because there is so much instability in the world.”

The writer pointed out that “world systems don’t disappear—they re-structure....It’s not a simple case of one model suddenly coming in to replace another....It is a process of transformation that occurs within the dynamics of internal collapse. It is difficult at times to see this transformation, as if transition is indistinguishable from disintegration in the early stages.

“The future is going to be about the people on the ground; about how resilient we are to the shocks/changes that are coming. It will be about how to cultivate a focused and positive state of mind and being. And more importantly, it will be a question of how to be inherently spiritual in our selves yet practical in our applications.” He adds that during these abnormal times of transition, individual action can have a much larger impact on historical developments. Perhaps, we ask, that is why there is such an attraction to solitary life right now, because there is such a need for “new monastic individuals”?

We leave this for you to ponder in your quiet space and time. Does this resonate with you? Would you care to elaborate? How does this perception make you feel about your own specific Call? Let us continue this conversation about living “outside the box”.

*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>; our email: pkfredette@frontier.com and the Blog for Lovers of Solitude: www.ravensbreadministries.com/blog.**



There is a world of difference between being present to another in loneliness or in solitude. In loneliness we are fixed on our own wants, what's 'missing' in our life. In loneliness we forget we have all that we need. Loneliness is not a happy state in which to be for any length of time. We may periodically experience loneliness and then we have choices to make in order to deal with that. Loneliness can lead to despair and self-loathing, jealousy, etc. or loneliness can lead to an inner development of a quiet solitude and peace of mind. In the state loneliness one seeks affirmation outside of oneself and usually not in the healthiest of ways. People who experience loneliness use people, places and things for a temporary life of their spirits but that soon fades and loneliness returns.

Solitude is much deeper. One does not have to go to a monastery or convent, to the mountain top or seaside to find solitude. Solitude is that quality of being human, being spiritual, that allows a person to be at home within themselves regardless of where they are physically. Henri Nouwen writes: "The difficult road is the road of conversion, the conversion from loneliness into solitude. To live a spiritual life we must first find the courage to enter into the desert of our loneliness and to change it by gentle and persistent efforts into a garden of solitude."

When we look at a beautiful garden, be it vegetables or flowers, we know that it took a lot of work to make it happen. The same is true of the solitary life. In our technological world we are moving faster than humans before us. We suffer from information overload, overdoses of 'breaking news.' In the midst of this, the solitary sits and listens to what is of importance.

May the Holy Spirit enkindle in me a strong desire for solitude so that at all times I may walk mindfully, live peacefully, and be consciously aware of the Divine Presence within and around me. Amen.



BOOK NOTES AND REVIEWS



EVERYDAY HOLINESS: A Guide to Living Here and Getting to Eternity

by Carolyn Humphreys (*Raven's Bread* reader) and James Kubicki.

Holiness is the most important developmental area in life and the greatest goal to which we can aspire. Because all good things lead to God, this book seeks to infuse a deeper meaning into the ordinary events of daily life. Holiness is a dynamic force that transforms every aspect of our day. It is our greatest need, deepest joy and hardest challenge.

200 pp. \$23.00 pbk. Published by Wipf and Stock Publishers 2018.

ISBN 10: 1582643047 ISBN 13: 978-1532643040

SEASONS OF DEATH AND LIFE: A Wilderness Memoir

by Maggie Ross.

Ross's sojourn as a caretaker in a wilderness of luminous, sometimes terrifying beauty, in the US northwest, allows her to find healing in solitude and through the kindness of human, canine, and farm creatures, as well as in the peace of the wild world around her.

224 pp. \$47.00 hbk; \$26.06 pbk. Wipf and Stock 2016.

ISBN 10: 1532601476; ISBN 13: 978-1532601477

SILENCE: The Power of Quiet in a World full of Noise

by Thich Nhat Hanh

This is a concise, practical guide to understanding and developing our most powerful inner resource — silence — to help us find joy, purpose and peace. Beauty calls to us every day but we need silence to respond to it.

208 pp. \$14.49 hbk; \$10.48 pbk. Published by Harper One 2016.

ISBN-10: 0062224700; ISBN-13: 978-0062224705

*It's not denominational,
or professional,
or even educational...
It's relational:*

Just be Present to the Presence

Raven's Rest Hermitage



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Meet the Lord
in Silence and Solitude*

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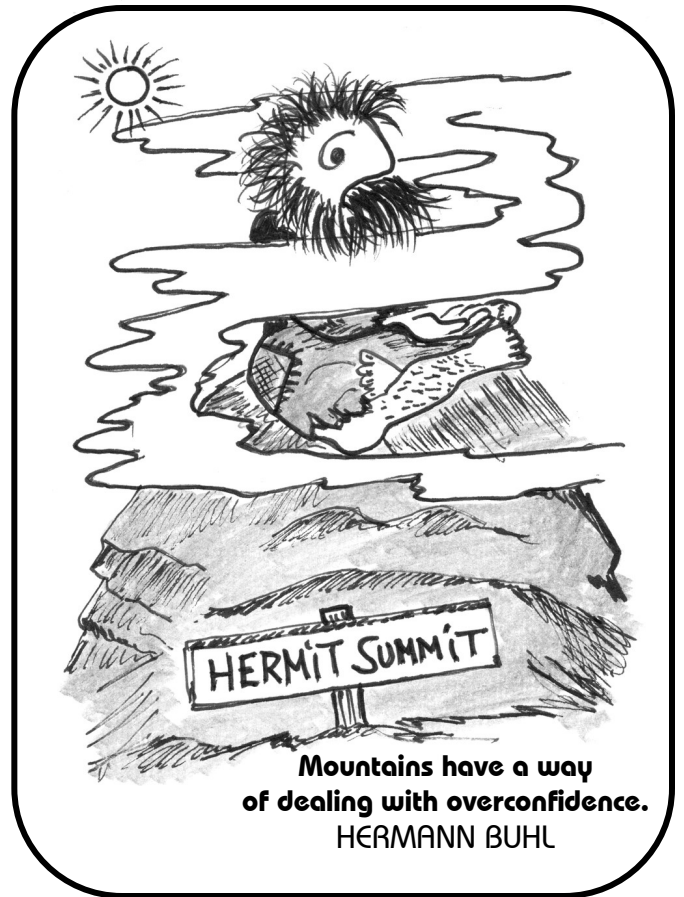
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Tell a friend



Anchorhold, Old Willingham, UK

Wood B. Hermit



**Mountains have a way
of dealing with overconfidence.
HERMANN BUHL**

Only when you drink from the river of silence shall you indeed sing. And when you have reached the mountain top, then you shall begin to climb. And when the earth shall claim your limbs, then shall you truly dance.

Khalil Gibran