



Raven's Bread

Food for Those in Solitude

Online Edition

November 2018

Thoughts In Solitude

Earlier this summer, I took vows to live my life as a Zen monk. In a dawn ritual, my head was shaved, I received a hand-sewn robe and a new name, Old Fire Skyward. I was welcomed by the Buddha and by my teacher into the Contemplative Order of Hsu Yun.

The following day, a five-hour drive back to south-western Wisconsin, a region of small towns, deep river valleys and high ridges with views of family farms and woodlands stretching to the far horizon. Three miles from town on a ridge-top meadow where I live with my husband B. and our dog, I began a new cycle of spiritual unfolding, nourished and guided by vows and name, robe and haircut.

Several weeks later I read a beautiful essay, "A Plumb Line for Our Lives" in which John Bachman asks, "Am I doing it right?" Reading his thoughtful reflection was a revelation. It seems there are others in addition to me who ask this question of themselves as they travel the path of solitude, silence and spiritual seeking. Bachman's question reminds me of the child's game of hide and seek. The "seeker" searches for where the hidden players might be. I remember the thrill of the search, the possibility of discovery around every corner, in every closet, and the frustration and doubt that set in as the minutes ticked by and my seeking was still in vain. It helped to have a witness who could say to me, "You're getting warm! Really warm!" With the reassurance offered by this witness, I could carry on my seeking, knowing that I was on track toward uncovering that which was hidden.

Seeking the Divine can be similar. Sometimes there is doubt, sometimes I want to know that I am getting warm. For the likes of early Christian monastics, the boundaries that established the Path of the seeker were solid and uncompromising: three windows, open at precise times. A modern version of monasticism, the one in which I have been trained, is that of the householder mo-

nastic. Living life as an ordinary person, I do the dishes and feed the dog, weed the gardens and build a rain water collection system, go for groceries, help neighbors harvest the garlic.

A Zen monk lives her ordinary life as a spiritual practice, each task and each encounter an opportunity to listen, to see, to pay full attention, to seek what is hidden in plain sight, in everything that arises. In this context, the witness, the clarity of one's seeking rests within the structure provided by the ever-changing present. Fully giving oneself over to this place and this moment, without any coming or going and with full acceptance of all that is coming and going: This is the Way, this is, "You are getting warmer."

Cellular data affords easy internet and phone connectivity; hence we are well-connected to the secular world while also retreated from it. Far from streetlights and highways and the imperative to lock our doors, we live within the cycles that sun and moon and stars and seasons make. We are reminded of where we are by the bird migrations, the oak saplings, the young fruit trees and the flowers seeded in June, all growing toward their maturity, the skeletons of old trees falling, then cut up for firewood. We endure bugs and their biting, wind and terrible storms, heat and humidity, cold and mud so that we can be a part of life on this ridge-top, so that it can shepherd us through the bitter sweetness of everything changing, everything.

Note: The author, Lao Huo Shakya, was inspired by the same article by John Bachman which graced the front of the August issue of Raven's Bread. She can be reached via www.asinglethread.net and zatma.org

*Originally written for "A Single Thread"
By Lao Huo Shakya
of the Order of Hsu Yun*

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The image of “living outside the box” as New Monastic Individuals struck many of you as a powerful expression of what we, as solitaires, are. In addition, many of you are wrestling with the hard questions about what we should be doing to help resolve the serious problems of our times.

A *raven* recently recommended a book to us: Field of Compassion, How the New Cosmology is Transforming Spiritual Life by Judy Cannato. There is a growing *scientific* recognition that all that exists in our world is inter-related. Energy and matter work together to maintain every existing thing, from a proton to a pebble to people. In addition

there is a formative force (sometimes called a morphogenic field) working with energy and matter which determines what and who each existing thing is. What is more remarkable is that these morphogenic fields have a profound influence on all other fields. It doesn't depend on physical proximity. This “non-local” influence suggests that there is no space between one field and another.

An interesting experiment, conducted in 1993, brought a large number of practitioners of meditation together with the plan that they would all spend two periods each day meditating with the intention of reducing stress and violent crime in a large American city. Statistical analysis of those two months showed a 25% drop in violent crime during that period, which could not be attributed to any other verifiable cause.

People trained in the technique of Reiki are very aware of how one person's energy field affects that of others, consciously or unconsciously. Such evidence just confirms our deep spiritual conviction that prayer can be an influence for good, both near and far. The ramifications of this are truly astounding. St. Seraphim of Sarov (famously) said hundreds of years ago: *Be at peace yourself and thousands around you will be saved!*

A further point being recognized is that *like* connects with *like*, even at apparently great distances. More energy is generated. This “like” can be kindly or criminal; moral or immoral. We see it all around us. As solitaires trying to live with compassionate regard for all, our combined “fields of compassion” can influence the world for the greater good with amazing power. For all we know, the world might be in far worse shape were it not for New Monastic Individuals.

We are profoundly grateful to ALL of you who took time to add some “bread” to this issue so that the *Raven* could carry it to nourish others. **WELCOME** to the new readers who have joined us this fall! **THANKS** to all those who have renewed and even added that extra bit which makes *RB* possible. Let us extend to one another the gifts of peace and compassion during the coming feasts of Light and revel in new gifts in the coming year!

*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.**

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It's relational:*

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The Hermits of Divine Mercy

are a newly incorporated group of people of prayer: clergy, married, single, widowed, various church affiliations, who practice their faith outside the church with God alone—hence hermits.

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Wood B. Hermit



**Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above,
and let the clouds pour down righteousness.
ISAIAH 45:8**