



Raven's Bread

Food for Those in Solitude

Vol: 7 No: 4 November 2003

Raven's Bread is a quarterly newsletter (FEB-MAY-AUG-NOV) for hermits and those interested in the eremitical life published by Paul and Karen Fredette. The newsletter seeks to affirm and support this way of life. ***Raven's Bread*** is a collaborative effort and thus depends on the shared reflections, stories, news, notices, letters, and information from hermits themselves. The ***Raven's Bread*** Web page is an abbreviated version of our full printed newsletter, which also includes a **Bulletin Board** and **Reader Forum** featuring responses to a quarterly discussion topic.

Please send your written contributions, as well as address changes and subscriptions to:

Raven's Bread
18065 Hwy 209
Hot Springs, NC 28743

The annual subscription to the printed newsletter is \$8.00 in USA and \$10.00 US currency for foreign subscriptions. (Drafts drawn on US banks are the most convenient form of payment by foreign subscribers.) Any extra donations will be used to subsidize subscriptions for hermits who cannot afford the full cost.

To E-mail ***Raven's Bread*** directly click on this link: fredette@nclink.net

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

zzzzzz **Thoughts in Solitude** zzzzzz

By: Alphonse Vinh, The Yinshih of Mole's End, Washington, DC

Occasionally I have been asked to explain about a Yinshih, a scholar-recluse once held in honor in the Classical Chinese tradition, a life-style I have now adopted for myself. Yinshihs have existed in every place and time (Walker Percy was a Southern Yinshih, Joseph Joubert a French one.) Many were poets and writers. Some were mystics. Others were retired scholars who sought a quiet life of spirituality and solitude. But what they all had in common was that they had renounced the "red dust of the world" and were dead to worldly ambition and desire for career success. The fortunate ones who lived in the days of the Empire like many of my ancestors, could write their farewell poems to the world at the age of forty, hang up their scholar's cap, and leave the Imperial Civil Service to take refuge on their estates or their little cottages or huts to devote themselves to contemplation, prayer, study, solitude, literature, and friendship. Very few Yinshihs rejected the pleasures of poetry and wine. They did not hate the world - only its unworthy and spiritually uninteresting temptations.

In times of great societal corruption, Yinshihs withdrew from society and public service in order to preserve their integrity, no matter the cost to them. Yinshihs have always been gentlemen and lovers of the life of the mind. They care not for conventions nor do they care much for being in the right society or climbing up the slimy pole of success. They don't care about such things because they think it's more beautiful to sip wine whilst sitting in their hermitage as the sun sets in the fields before them. They cherish not the group so much as the individual. They are not meant for the big stage but prefer the quiet life in the shadows where it is possible to observe the current flowing quietly beneath the waves.

Yinshih suffer all the afflictions of humanity and sin greatly, too. But it is their way to strive not to contribute to the general suffering of humanity by their own failings. Their

ministry through writing and personal friendship is with any individual person whom God may send their way.

Yinshihs are happy about many things that more society-minded people may miss. They do not see their way as better but simply as a reasonable, individual alternative to a group-oriented, power-driven, society-focused way of existence. If Yinshihs have to scratch a living in the world, they will strive to do so with integrity and good will, but they will always see their livelihood as a means to live fully a yinshih life - away from the world. Yinshihs don't know the meaning of careers. It's meaningless to them. They care about their place within this beautiful and mysterious universe that God created, they care about worthwhile friendships and good poetry. Once they have earned their living in the world, they feel they have the right to their real life after the working day is over. Yinshihs value, above all, the inner universe of the individual and the private life within which they hold as most holy.

A Word from Still Wood

In August, we discussed the issue of how readers of ***Raven's Bread*** might define themselves. As the editors, we are increasingly aware that many of you find not only helpful information but profound encouragement through the discovery that there are others "out there" who, like yourself, believe they are called to live a form of hermit life. Readers feel related to one another through spiritual bonds. We offered the term "kindred" as one way of expressing this real and vital relationship. Some readers have joined in the discussion and you will find their thoughts elsewhere in this issue.

This kind of "shared discussion" is the heart and purpose of ***Raven's Bread*** which we have always envisioned as a forum of exchange among lovers of solitude rather than a place for scholarly studies of the eremitical life. Many of you have told us that what means most to you is this simple sharing of personal experience by others struggling with the particular trials and adventures that are inherent to solitary living. We thank the many who, over the years (seven to be exact!) have sent us the reflections, articles, and responses that filled the pages of each issue. We (Paul and Karen) do not "write" ***RB***. We are merely the fortunate collectors and occasional editors of the riches which you offer to us and all your spiritual kindred.

As we were mulling over these thoughts prior to assembling this November issue, we decided to offer you an invitation to share some of your personal experiences of living solitary life: How did you begin? What proved to be the biggest hurdles? Did you encounter surprises? Who proved helpful (or otherwise) to you on your journey? We will launch these personal accounts in this issue and hope others of you will be inspired to assist your "kin" by sharing likewise. If you prefer, we will publish accounts under a pseudonym - all we ask is that the "story" be the experience of a real person!

This issue also carries some delightful sharings about how hermits and solitaries in various parts of the world celebrate the coming holiday season. Thank you to all who took precious time to prepare this gift of love for your ***RB*** family. And speaking of gratitude, we editors are very, very grateful to the numbers who noticed the expiration date on their address label and renewed their subscriptions. Many even included that little "extra" that makes it possible for ***RB*** to fly to hermits whose funds are slim and enables us to offer the extra services of Resources, Library, Back Issues and other "connections" that are part of Raven's ministry.

As we approach this holiday season, let us make it a prayerful celebration of Holy Days during which we gift one another with presents of love and "prayer-care" (as one of our readers so delightfully phrases it!) that enrich both givers and receivers. We offer you our very special love and gratitude from our mountain retreat of Still Wood. We will light our holiday candles for each and all of you!

**With Grateful love,
Karen & Paul**

The 2001 Survey of Raven's Bread Readers

Since "The Survey" was initiated more than 620 copies were mailed to our

readership. Over 175 became participants. A truly gratifying experience that continues to generate a wide range of responses. The volume of returns stays at a fantastic 25%!!! It says something wonderful about everyone who cooperated in this project, making it truly reflective of what is happening in our own time re solitary lifestyles. We continue to receive requests for **Survey Results** and back issues containing the summaries we have printed thus far.

The current print issue of **RB** (November 2003) features the results of the Ninth of Ten Reflection Questions: "*Do you cultivate an environmentally responsible lifestyle?*"

"Not surprisingly, respondents to this question were overwhelmingly positive. Many listed a number of ingenious and carefully thought-out ways of living simply with environmental responsibility." from editor's introduction, pg. 4 of November 2003 Print Issue)

We are still offering the initial "big picture" summary from the eleven categories covered in the Survey's check-off section (Personal Information, Location, Religious Affiliation and Status, Lifestyle, Prayer Forms and Religious Practices, Financial Situation, Spiritual Direction, and Difficulties) which was published in the August 2001 Issue. In the next issue, we will review with our readers the material received in answer to the tenth (and final) Reflection Question. Before long we hope to make a complete Report of the entire survey available from **RB RESOURCES**.

If you are interested in obtaining the **2001 Raven's Bread Survey Results**, these initial reports are available upon request to our online readers for \$3.00 each (U.S. currency):

By Mail:

Raven's Bread
18065 Hwy 209
Hot Springs, NC 28743

By Telephone: 1-828-622-3750

By E-Mail: fredette@nlink.net

**The small truth has words that are clear;
the great truth has great silence.**

TAGORE

(with thanks to *Heron Dance*)

zzz Sounding Solitude zzz

by: *Spencer Furbush, Stillness Hermitage*

The early part of our interior contemplative journey involves turning away from exterior attractions in order to bring the attention of the mind back within the inner chamber. Later, there may come an arising, or upwelling, out of that interior peace.

The turning within involves the self-denial of renouncing our idle thoughts. The rational thought required for conducting our ordinary affairs is a good and necessary part of life, but the constant jumble of thoughts that run around in the mind like children in a playground is useless. They prevent the attention from turning within and realizing the true self. Thoughts appear in the mind. This is the nature of the mind, and it is harmful to try and prevent it, but it is not necessary to engage these thoughts in dialogue. If we resist the temptation to form a chain of thinking based on any thought, then that thought will evaporate and another will bubble up. This is not easy and it involves a self-denial since we identify our ego self with these idle thoughts. To engage seriously in this process of denying our idle thoughts, is our own personal crucifixion, yet it will someday bring forth the resurrection of our true self.

When the time is right, perhaps after many years of difficult struggle in the practice of stillness, there will come the arising. From deep within, and in the silence and stillness

of interior peace that is like a death to the ego self, there comes the upwelling. This may be strong and very dynamic at first, and last only briefly. Generally it will moderate to a more gentle and sustained condition. This upwelling is an opening out that has been variously interpreted and conceptualized by different religious traditions but the basic experience seems to be a truth of our human nature. We are left with the impression that our true experience arises out of some vast and fundamentally unknowable condition, such that we are a mystery arising out of mystery. It is stillness that allows us to perceive this confluence of mysteries. Many lead good and holy lives without being drawn into this stillness. Others are drawn to it like a moth to a flame.

Discussion Topic for February 2004 Issue:

What is now or has been your most meaningful/challenging ascetical practice or penitential period (e.g. Lent, Ramadan, etc.)?

Deadline: January 5, 2004

TAOIST MEDITATION

Close your eyes and you will see clearly
Cease to listen and you will hear truth
Be silent and your heart will sing
Seek no contact and you will find union
Be still and you will move forward in the tide of the spirit
Be gentle and you will not need strength
Be patient and you will achieve all things
Be humble and you remain entire."
from Heron Dance

"A Suggestion"

Trying to get in touch with another hermit? Want contact from a hermit or solitary? Aware of opportunities that may be of interest to solitaries? Have you a service to offer? Are you looking to locate or re-locate a hermitage? Why not place your message on the **Bulletin Board** of *Raven's Bread* (printed version). Requests are posted **free of charge** for our regular subscribers.

Resources Available from *Raven's Bread*

(all prices include postage)

Readings in Spirituality - Annotated Bibliography by Sharon Jeanne Smith **31pp. \$15.00**

Solitude & Union: A Select Bibliography on the Hermit Way of Life by Cecilia W. Wilms **26pp. \$13.00**

Commentary on Canon 603 from "The Law of Consecrated Life" by Jean Beyer SJ, 1988 Translated from the French by W. Becker, 1992 **10pp. \$3.00**

Hermits: The Juridical Implications of Canon 603 by Helen L. Macdonald, Researcher Novalis: St. Paul University, Ottawa, ONT **24pp. \$12.00**

Notes to Guide the Beginning Hermit by A Hermit of Mercy **15pp. \$7.50**

Statutes for Hermits by The Bishops of France (1989)

12 pp. \$6.00

Fellowship of Solitaries

Comprised of and open to religious solitaires of all stripes. The Fellowship is ecumenical and has no official connections with any church. People may join the Fellowship either as Members or as Associates. All receive a regular Newsletter and a List of Members, so that they may be prayerfully aware of each other in their different paths and to make contact with each other if they so wish.

Correspondent: Eve Baker, Coed Glas, Talgarth Road, Bronllys, Brecon, Powys, LD3 0HN

To email Fellowship of Solitaires directly click on this link: solitaries@onetel.com

To access the website of Fellowship of Solitaires click on this

link: <http://www.solitaries.org.uk/>

Four Articles by Kenneth C. Russell. Reprinted by permission from "*Review for Religious*" (excellent footnotes & references)

Being a Hermit: Where and How 12 pp, \$6.00

Acedia - The Dark Side of Commitment 4 pp. \$2.00

The dangers of Solitude 5 pp. \$2.50

Must hermits Work? 10 pp. \$5.00

2001 Reader Survey: Initial Findings

Compilation of data from 11 categories (personal information, location, religious affiliation and status, lifestyle, prayer forms and religious practices, financial situation, spiritual direction, difficulties).

Reprinted from *Raven's Bread* Vol.5 No.3. **2 pp. \$3.00**

Compilation of data from First Reflection Question: "For me the grace and essence of solitary living is..."

Reprinted from *Raven's Bread* Vol.5 No.4. **2 pp. \$3.00**

Compilation of data from Second Reflection Question: "How did you come to recognize your call to religious / solitary / hermit life?"

Reprinted from *Raven's Bread* Vol.6 No.1. **2 pp. \$3.00**

Compilation of data from Third Reflection Question: "Reactions of others to my choice of eremitic life..."

Reprinted from *Raven's Bread* Vol.6 No.2. **2 pp. \$3.00**

Compilation of data from Fourth Reflection Question: "For members of religious congregations: Reactions of the community to my choice of hermit life..."

Reprinted from *Raven's Bread* Vol.6 No.3. **2 pp. \$3.00**

Compilation of data from Fifth Reflection Question: "For former members of religious congregations: What prompted you to leave? Was your departure related to your attraction to solitude..."

Reprinted from *Raven's Bread* Vol.6 No.4. **2 pp. \$3.00**

Compilation of data from Sixth Reflection Question: "If you are married

and attracted to Solitude, how do you work this out with your spouse?"
Reprinted from ***Raven's Bread*** Vol.7 No.1. **1 page \$2.00**

Compilation of data from Seventh Reflection Question: "What has been your experience of finding spiritual guidance?"
Reprinted from ***Raven's Bread*** Vol.7 No.2. **2 pages \$3.00**

Compilation of data from Eighth Reflection Question: "What limitations do you set to social relationships? Family Obligations?"
Reprinted from ***Raven's Bread*** Vol.7 No.3. **2 pages \$3.00**

Compilation of data from Ninth Reflection Question: "Do you cultivate an environmentally responsible lifestyle?"
Reprinted from ***Raven's Bread*** Vol.7 No.4. **2 pages \$3.00**

Raven's Rest

The Silence...The Solitude...The Solace of God...

Retreatants welcome to schedule time beginning April 4, (Palm Sunday) 2004 at **Raven's Rest** Hermitage (a fully furnished apartment with kitchenette & private entrance) here at **Still Wood**. Offers opportunity to experience solitude and silence on a forested mountainside of the Newfound Range in the rural Smokies, approximately 35 miles N.E. of the Great Smokies National Park and 35 miles N.W. of Asheville. Spiritual Direction available upon request. Suggested offering \$25.00 per day includes meals. For further information, contact:

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BOOK NOTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Camaldolese Extraordinary: The Life, Doctrine, and Rule of Blessed Paul Giustiniani by Dom Jean Leclercq and Blessed Paul Guistiniani, edited by the Camaldolese Hermits of Monte Corona. *In this single volume the editors offer both the biography never before published in English; and the doctrinal synthesis, **Alone with God**, much-loved when it first appeared, and out-of-print for over a generation. Leclercq's masterpieces are flanked on the left by a variegated general introduction and on the right by selections from Blessed Paul's **Rule**, a translation of St. Romuald's **Brief Rule** with commentary, an epilogue sketching the history of Monte Corona, and ample indices. There are also a dozen carefully selected illustrations. It is a book not only aimed at monks, nuns, and scholars, but to give any reader a powerful incentive to enter into or to delve more deeply into the spiritual life.* 2003. Hardcover, 536 pp. \$35.00. Ercam Editions, Holy Family Hermitage AFC, 3375 County Road 36, Bloomingdale, OH 43910-7903. Tel: 800-773-6455. www.familyland.org.P>

The Monk of Mount Athos: Staretz Silouan 1866-1938 by Archimandrite Sophrony, translated from the Russian by Rosemary Edmonds. *This account of*

Silouan's life, written by his disciple, Archimandrite Sophrony, reveals not only Silouan's personality and teaching, but also the spiritual struggles which truly made him a staretz (i.e., a monk whose God-given wisdom and insight enabled him to serve as a spiritual guide for others). Staretz Silouan's own writings are gathered in a companion volume, **Wisdom from Mount Athos**, also available from SVS Press. 2001. 124 pp. Paperback. St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 575 Scarsdale Road, Crestwood, NY 10707. Tel: 800-204-2665.

Silence, Simplicity, and Solitude: A Guide for Spiritual Retreat by David A. Cooper. The author, who has studied mysticism for thirty years, is widely traveled, has a colorful and varied background, and brings to this short volume his experience in spiritual retreats in a number of traditions, including Sufi, Vipassana, Kabbalah, and Zen. 1992. 309 pp. Paperback. Belltower an imprint of Harmony Books, a division of Crown Publishers, Inc., 201 East 50th Street, New York, NY



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