



Raven's Bread

Food for Those in Solitude

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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 Site offers an **ABBREVIATED** version of our full printed newsletter, which also includes a **Bulletin Board**, a **Reader Forum** featuring responses to a quarterly discussion topic, and a **Letters** section from the readership.

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

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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 On Solitude zzzzzz

Excerpted from "Defining Enlightenment"

by Judith Blackstone

Published in Finding a Way: Essays on Spiritual Practice

Edited by Lorette Zirker

*Because hermit life is usually a mid-life calling, we can describe it as a specific phase of maturity. The following is excerpted from an article by Judith Blackstone examining a particular development frequently experienced as we grow into a deepening maturity that solitude offers us - namely, enlightenment. **Editor's Note.***

Life has meaning because it has direction. It has a goal. Most of us create meaning in our lives by creating goals for ourselves such as family, wealth, artistic achievement. But life has a goal that we don't have to create, that is inherent in its nature, in our nature. Our own personal life evolves towards a specific destination that is sometimes called self-realization, or enlightenment. Just as our created goals are based on our desire for something, we also have a fundamental desire for life's inherent goal. It is this underlying desire for enlightenment that often causes us to feel unfulfilled, even after we have achieved our created goals.

The word enlightenment often is used in a general way to describe a variety of experiences. In my definition, enlightenment refers to a specific phase of human maturity, a specific and unmistakable shift in the way one experiences life. Although enlightenment is the most concrete, actual experience of being alive, describing it always sounds abstract, until you have experienced it yourself.

Enlightenment is the realization, the lived experience, that we are made of pure consciousness, that pure consciousness is our fundamental nature and our ultimate reality; and that everything else in the universe is also made of pure consciousness, so that our own being is fundamentally unified with all of nature. As one fourth-century Chinese sage put it, "Everything in the universe is one and the same root as my own self." In enlightenment, we experience life from the vantage point of that root.

We experience our own self as unbroken consciousness, pervading our body and our environment. This means that there is a continuity between our inner and outer perception. We have a sense of vast space, as if all our perceptions were one single tapestry of reflections in a single mirror. We feel that we are made of clear, empty space, finer than air, unbounded and motionless. Within this vast space moves the changing progression of our thoughts, feelings, sensations, and perceptions.

I call this unbroken, pervasive dimension "fundamental consciousness." Before we realize fundamental consciousness, we identify ourselves as our sensations, feelings, perceptions, ideas, memories. But when we realize fundamental consciousness, we recognize that these discrete, transitory experiences come and go within the fundamental ground that is our true identity.

When people begin to realize fundamental consciousness, they report that they feel translucent, or permeable. One man told me excitedly that he had discovered that the world was round, because he could now experience the space behind him and to the sides of him, rather than just in front of him. The shift from our frontal self-object relationship with the world to an experience of continuity with the world affects every aspect of our lives, including our ability to understand and to love; even our physical health. One woman told me that before her realization (enlightenment), she felt that she was watching life; now she felt she was participating. Experiencing a continuity with the world, she felt a basic kinship with everything she encountered. And because she experienced her inner responses at the same time as she experienced the outer world, she felt engaged in the encounters.

In enlightenment, we experience that we are becoming real; not something new, but something we have always been yet only barely known. Several people had expressed fear to me about who they will become if they allow themselves to become enlightened. But once they have realized fundamental consciousness, they see that they have only become themselves, a deeply familiar and instantly recognizable, being. The work that so many of us have been doing to become more real, more open to life, has been leading towards the realization of our fundamental dimension of consciousness. It is crucial to our personal growth that we recognize our essential reality and demystify our understanding of enlightenment.

Another related misconception about enlightenment is that it is an "altered" state of consciousness. Enlightenment often is confused with the peak experiences that many people have, for example, while looking up at the stars or witnessing the birth of a baby. But a peak experience is by definition a momentary event, often accompanied by intense emotions such as awe or ecstasy. Enlightenment is not a momentary alteration of consciousness that one goes to and returns from. Enlightenment is a clear, alert perception of the present moment that represents a lasting refinement of consciousness. It is a lasting transformation of our being, involving our ongoing relation to ourselves and our environment.

To become enlightened is to experience life directly, without the interference of psychological defenses, projections, and preconceptions, and without the distraction of our habitual mental chatter. We thus experience no barrier, no gap, between ourselves and our experience. When we are not enlightened, we live abstractly, in our idea of life. Instead of seeing this particular flower, we see a general flower, like an image from a file in our minds marked "flower." And our flower file may be full of memories and associations that cause us to respond to the flower with feelings that are not directly related to this particular flower. In other words, we respond in a distorted or diminished way to our distorted or diminished perception of the world.

Many people fear that the actual world will be dull and ugly compared to their abstract dream-life. But our senses, when (relatively) unfettered by psychological defense and fantasy, reveal a more vivid, more balanced world than we ever imagined. If we are seeing a preconceived flower, a composite of many past flowers, we will not notice the richness of color, softness of texture, exact form of the present flower and we certainly will not see the subtle radiance that surrounds the flower, that matches the light of our own aliveness.

The paradox of enlightenment is that we can receive the stimulation of our environment ever more fully because we have more access to the depths of ourselves where we feel everything, joy and pain, more deeply than before. But at the same time, we experience ourselves as whole and steady, as the unchanging ground of fundamental consciousness. One of my teachers once likened this state to the biblical burning bush. "We burn," he said, "but we are not consumed."

A Word from Still Wood

I was getting my twenty minutes of aerobic exercise trudging up our near-vertical driveway with the mail in hand when I looked around at the drab scene of stripped trees, silhouetted against grey clouds and heartily wished this depressing season would soon pass. "If only the leaves were back..." I began to mutter when I heard another Voice over-ride my petulance. "What? You are always complaining that you don't have enough time and now you want a whole season to fly by? What will you miss without winter in your year?"

In mid-step, I turned my eyes to the leaf-litter plastered to the steep bank along the drive. It was brown, as was the mud beneath my feet just like the naked briars and dried weeds poking out of the frozen earth. Brown is NOT my favorite color and I have frequently wondered why the Lord uses so much of it in His outdoor color scheme. However, I decided it would only be a fair conversation if I gave this brown which so depressed me a closer look.

The first thing I realized is that there is brown and then there is...brown. The shades of brown along that bank ranged from khaki to coffee; from cinnamon to sand; from cocoa..... ah, Lord, You win again! Your brown world is far from drab!" Even as I admitted defeat (yet again), the God of surprises was preparing yet another for me.

Later that day I was with a friend who suddenly pointed toward the winter sky and exclaimed, "Look, a snow dog!" I looked up and beheld a glowing rainbow ball trailing a drift of white cloud. I had never seen such a wonder in my life...and before the day was over, I saw a total of THREE snow dogs! Apparently they precede a snow storm...and if their forecast was correct, we were about to get a major one.

Today the brown world is quickly turning white and the temps are dropping rapidly. I suspect it shall be some time before I see my drab woods again and when I do, they shall be most welcome! Who ever said that winter was boring? "Forgive me, Lord! Forgive me for not walking my drive with my eyes fully open to all that is there."

Being fully aware in the present moment allows us to discover the beauty that surrounds us. Only when we are in the "here and now" can we truly see. And the "here and now" is the only time we have. The past is gone; the future not yet. All we have is Now in which to find our God - and the full beauty of our world.

As hermits and lovers of solitude, being alive to the present moment is our single, most effective way to "pray continually." The Holy Now is our secret hermitage, one which is ever changing. Not all moments will be as astonishing as a Snow Dog; many will be as drab and difficult as the Brown Days of winter; others may pose the risks of a major snow storm, but in every moment, we can find the Hand of God at work, sustaining us in our struggles or surrounding us with delights.

In this issue, several of our readers have kindly shared what their personal holy space is like and their hermitages are as diverse as God's changing world! One has lovingly landscaped acres; another, a cherished garden shed; and yet another is simply the wonder of the Holy Space within. As always, we feel that the responses to each issue's topic or the questions and sharings in the Letters are the "yeast" of our raven's "bread."

Yeast, as we know, is what permeates all the various ingredients and in so doing turns them into something more than what they had been separately. Now we have loaves to nourish the hungry. Once again we thank you for your generosity - the literary, the monetary, and the spiritual gifts. May the love you share come back to you a hundredfold, as does the bread cast upon the waters.

**With Grateful love,
Karen & Paul**

**The journey into the inner self is not just the important one,
it is the only one.**

**We need to listen to the sound beyond the silence.
from *Sayings of Yeats***

by W.B. Yeats (1865-1939)

zzzzzz Prayer - Rhythm - Work zzzzzz

By: Carol McDonough, Australia

Lying on my bed I wondered: What might these three words: *prayer*, *rhythm* and *work* mean? How do their dictionary meanings illumine our eremitic understandings?

Prayer: About two decades ago I became aware that for us Christians there is only one prayer - the prayer of Christ into which we are grafted at Baptism. Our only true work in life is to be given over to listening (audire) to Christ's prayer which will grow us in love (Hebrew: *hesed* and *emet*). All else unfolds from being always in listening love. Truly prayer is work; work is prayer. St. Benedict formalized that God-given knowing into the Opus Dei, the work of God in Choir through the sevenfold liturgical Hours. We hermits have varied ways of expressing that work of God, depending on experience, temperament, life circumstances. For example, Mother Mary Clare, (1977), one time Prioress of the Sisters of the Love of God, Oxford, commented that the prayer of hermits varies from the full expression of the choir nun or monk, even in solitude, to the Office being expressed through near-constant repetition of the Jesus Prayer.

Rhythm: (taken from the dictionary at Answers.com with my italicized commentary)

1. Movement or variation characterized by the regular recurrence or alternation of different quantities or conditions: i.e. the rhythm of the tides. *For me: deepening transforming rhythm over the years influenced by the Spirit, my director, living and health circumstances; immersion in the annual liturgical rhythms and creation's seasonal rhythms.*

2. The patterned, recurring alternations of elements of sound or speech. *Now how important is THAT for us hermits!!! Especially the rhythm of silence and sounds or speech. I believe, there is a rhythm of listening silence - interior speech or song, or when the very sounds of nature pattern our silence.*

Work: (taken from the dictionary at Answers.com with italicized commentary)

1. Physical or mental effort or activity directed toward the production or accomplishment of something. *For the hermit, the loving work of prayer is primary - offering Jesus' petitions unto the Trinity; being held by the Spirit to the still, small voice of God; offering prayers for all circumstances of earthly life...international, national, communal, church, personal. Then there is the work of self-sustenance, providing for our physical needs, as well as the daily work of the hermitage.*

2a. A job; employment; looking for work. *Some of us have no choice about our work; some of us are good at creating "employment." I am reminded of a comment by an older hermit of Mt. Athos looking down the cliff at a young hermit (of 6 years duration) commenting, "He has two books as well as that hammock. Eventually he will throw them all away." Computer? Books? Garden? For me, there is some re-involvement in parish now that I live on parish grounds after five wandering years. (I wrote "wondering" - that too!)*

2b. A trade, profession, or other means of livelihood. *I believe that our 'profession' as a hermit is simply 'being' for the love of God and His glory. That is the wellspring of our livelihood.*

3. Something that one is doing, making or performing, especially as an occupation or undertaking; a duty or task; begin the day's work. *And we do begin anew each day, however poorly, dancing with God and our given baptismal vocation 'stumblingly, grotesquely' (another hermits' recent words, with which I resonated.) Being prepared to go within and face the darkness and shadows of our lives, offering them to God for the darkness and shadows of our species - a 'work' that is even more critical at this time. I believe that is why the Spirit has created a resurgence in the hermit vocation.*

4a. The part of a day devoted to an occupation or undertaking: I met her after work. *Well, the hermit vocation is 24/7/365; the work of Jesus' prayer never ends. Mother Mary Clare (again): "The prayer of the night becomes increasingly necessary for most solitaries." "Yes!" Over the years I have found the hermit vocation is not something you take on and off like clothes, it is integral to the very 'cell of my being,' I am never not a hermit.*

4b. One's place of employment: Shall I call you at home or at work? *No, it is desirable not to call, please email. But hang on! The window on the world!! Essential for all*

hermits except those called to the fully reclusive way, either continually or rhythmically. "A hermit is not a recluse." It was very funny hearing a hermit from Britain tell me that insistently when I have said it so very often!!!) I would imagine most of us are in deeper reclusion right now, with Lent at hand.

5. Something that has been produced or accomplished through the effort, activity, or agency of a person or thing: Erosion is the work of wind, water and time. *This example is relevant in each of our lives. The agent, of course, is God. May we be eroded into the true image of God's likeness over time...through God's wind of the Spirit and the waters of Baptism. St. Therese of Lisieux's comment (at age 16), "We'd never want to fall? ...What does it matter, my Jesus, if I fall at each moment? I see my weakness through this and this is a great gain for me...Sanctity does not consist in saying beautiful things; it does not even consist in thinking them or feeling them! It consists in suffering...suffering everything with joy and peace."*

6. An artistic creation, such as a painting, sculpture, or literary or musical composition: a work of art. *Our manner of the life does release generativity, creativity... May we each be God's artistic creations. May our lives be our art. May whatever artistry is generated in our lives, and by our minds and hearts and hands be a fashioning of beauty for God's glory and the world's enlightenment.*

7. The manner, style, or quality of working; workmanship. *The Divine Artist crafts us, we but dance with God's working...co-creating with God.*

Discussion Topic for May 2007 Issue:

How do Hermits cope when they must be out of their hermitage for brief or extended periods as well as cope with all the distractions of caring for an aging relative?

(Please limit responses to 300 words or less)

Deadline: April 1, 2007

**The father uttered one word;
that word is his son,
and he utters him forever in everlasting silence;
and in silence the soul has to hear it.**

Juan de la Cruz (1542-91)

Hermit Resources Available from *Raven's Bread* February 2007

(all prices include postage)

BIBLIOGRAPHIES

Annotated Readings in Spirituality - by Sharon Jeanne Smith **21pp. \$5.00**

Solitude & Union: A Select Bibliography on the Hermit Way of Life by Cecilia W. Wilms **26pp. \$5.00**

Annotated Books on Solitude - **4pp. \$2.00**

JURIDICAL COMMENTARIES

Commentary on Canon 603 from "The Law of Consecrated Life" by Jean Beyer SJ,

1988 Translated from the French by W. Becker, 1992 **10pp. \$2.50**

Hermits: The Juridical Implications of Canon 603 by Helen L. Macdonald, Researcher Novalis: St. Paul University, Ottawa, ONT **24pp. \$5.00**

Statutes for Hermits by The Bishops of France (1989)
12 pp. \$2.50

HERMIT RULES

Rules for Hermits (Spanish & English) by Padre Justo, O.P. **9pp. \$2.50**

Eremitic Rule of Life **30pp. \$5.00**

Franciscan Plan of Life in Hermitage **4pp. \$2.00**

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Raven's Bread Survey 2001 - Compiled Responses **23pp. \$5.00**

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Notes to Guide the Beginning Hermit by A Hermit of Mercy **15pp. \$3.00**

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NCR 2004 "Sacristans of Emptiness" by Rich Heffern **6pp. \$2.50**

Discernment Criteria - "Marabou" 1996 - **6pp. \$2.00**

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

Where God Begins To Be A Woman's Journey into Solitude by Karen Karper

An Authors Guild Back inprint.com edition

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To access the website of Fellowship of Solitaries click on this link:

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

BOOK NOTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

God Hunger

by John Kirvan.

Here is a book that takes the God hunger seriously by providing 50 challenging experiences for the soul built around the core spiritual insights of ten great Western mystics (Christian, Jewish, and Islamic). From the book: "...let ourselves be caught, for if there is a human hunger for God, it is matched by God's hunger for union with us."

1999. Softcover. \$12.95 (US).

ISBN 1-893732-03-7

Sorin Books, P.O. Box 1006, Notre Dame, IN 46556-1006

Tel: 219-287-2831

Raw Faith, Nurturing the Believer in All of Us

by John Kirvan.

Faith begins with a voice out of the dark that speaks to a hunger so deep that nothing but God can satisfy it. And none but raw faith can respond to it and sustain it.

2000. Softcover. 192 pp. \$12.95 (US)

ISBN 1-893732-18-5

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