

COLLECTING YOUR HAIKU

It is a good idea to get a little book in which to keep your haiku. A small artist's sketchbook is an inexpensive and durable notebook. Most of my haiku occurs when I am sitting out in the fields or during a stroll in the woods. I try to remember to have some paper with me. Later I take my scraps of paper and enter the haiku in my book. Sometimes I go for months between haiku, yet there is still a stream. Most people record the date after the poem; some put the time of day.

It is important to keep all your haiku, even the "bad" ones. For haiku is a way of exploring your inner world and you do not always hear what you are saying for a few days, weeks or even years.

We can usually find different levels of meaning in a haiku poem. People sometimes assume that a haiku master chooses a piece of nature in order to make a profound philosophical point. This is putting things backward. There are few profound parts of life — only little moments. But if you focus on something little it becomes large. Also, where you are psychologically and spiritually will determine what you can see or hear. If we are truly honest in expressing our relationship to the natural world, there may be double or quadruple levels of meaning, simply because we are touching the life process. Life is like an onion; there are many layers. When you peel back one layer, another becomes apparent. You should not try to write with secondary meaning or any meaning at all; that is only cleverness and can poison your well.

There is much to be learned from our haiku. The lessons are not always apparent. One day before I followed the monastic life I was wrestling with some major decisions about which crossroad to take in my life. The matter had been turned over often in my head and discussed with family and close friends. I was not ready to face that I simply had to make a decision. I attempted to lose myself in the preparations for a weekend gathering of professional colleagues. We came together to get a sharp focus on the problems of the world and look at all kinds of organizational and interpersonal concerns. Just before I left home I was sitting by the fireplace and a cricket walked out on the hearth. I watched him for a few moments. Then I drove a couple of hours to the country lodge where we met. Shortly after I arrived all the participants gathered together. It was evening. The light was dim. The mood was rather solemn. In the quiet before we began, a cricket walked out into the middle of the floor. I wrote:

*Here deep in the woods
I am found by the cricket
who lives in my house.*

The haiku and the image of the cricket stayed within my head during the meeting. Some time later, I really heard what I had written. It was no different here than at home. I knew what the issues were. The decision had to be made. Sometimes I think it is presumptuous to talk about "writing" haiku. Often I feel more like a clumsy medium at a séance. If I can detach sufficiently from my self-centeredness, I can be an instrument for some nourishing poems.