

# A BRIEF HAIKU EXERCISE

Taken from Cliff Edwards'  
THE HAIKU WAY TO ENLIGHTENMENT

First, find a safe place in nature where you can be quiet and undisturbed. You may simply go out on your lawn or into a garden, visit a park or a nature trail. If you are with others, it may be best to sit some distance from each other and agree not to distract others by talking. Seat yourself so that you are relaxed by alert. Just as samurai swordsmen of old Japan knew that their lives depended on complete alertness yet complete relaxation, so the life of your haiku practice depends on the combination of wide-awake attention and relaxed patience.

Now it would be helpful to close your eyes for three to four minutes. Concentrate on sounds. Perhaps you hear the rumble of trucks on some distant highway or the barking of dogs in a far neighborhood. Now listen for nature's sounds close at hand. Perhaps you hear a breeze in the leaves. You can detect the rhythm of the breeze coming, swelling, going. You hear a gumball fall or a leaf ticking against a branch. Perhaps you can distinguish the chatter of squirrels or songs of birds. Now concentrate on your sense of touch and temperature. If you are sitting against a tree, you can feel its rough bark against your back. You may feel the soft leaves or grass under you, the breeze on the back of your hand, the warm sun on your cheek or closed eyelids.

Now open your eyes. Notice the light and shadows, the colors, the movement of leaves and tree limbs. Pay attention to the leaves and grass closest to you. The less you move, the quieter you are, the more life-forms you are likely to find close beside you. Be patient. Insect sounds will tell you when you are silent enough that nature accepts you as a companion rather than fears you as an intruder. When insects and other small creatures feel free to sing and buzz around you, you are learning the silence needed for the haiku way of experiencing.

After a period of silence, try picking up a leaf very quietly and carefully. Study it. It may have small creatures of its own on its surface, or evidence that it has been a source of food for others. Now perhaps we are ready to try a haiku. Try to find the simplest words to speak for the moment and what you have discovered:

*Among leaves and twigs  
One tiny red spider runs  
From a spot of sun*