haiku mind

108 Poems to Cultivate Awareness & Open Your Heart

PATRICIA DONEGAN

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgments · *ix*
Introduction · *xi*
Haiku Mind · *1*
Notes · *217*
Credits · *223*
Index of Poets · *229*

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INTRODUCTION

Cutting a pear
sweet drops drip
from the knife

SHIKI MASAOKA

I wanted to write this book to share the idea of "haiku mind"—a simple yet profound way of seeing our everyday world and living our lives with the awareness of the moment expressed in haiku—and to therefore hopefully inspire others to live with more clarity, compassion, and peace. The root of haiku mind is found in the widely-known poetic form of haiku, a form of poetry that contains seventeen syllables in three phrases (5-7-5) in Japanese or usually three lines in English. A fine haiku presents a crystalline moment of heightened awareness in simple imagery, traditionally using a *kigo* or season word from nature. It is this crystalline moment that is most appealing. However, this moment is more than a reflection of our day-to-day life—it is a deep reminder for us to pause and to be present to the details of the everyday. It is this way of being in the world with awakened open-hearted awareness—of being mindful of the ordinary moments of our lives—that I've come to call "haiku mind." My under-

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standing of this view of haiku mind came out of my personal journey, and three profound teachings or awakenings.

It began with "seeing an orange"—it could have been a pear, but in my case it was an orange—in sunlight on the kitchen table. It was 1974 and I was living in Hawaii after my Peace Corps stint in Korea. I had just finished a one-week group meditation retreat with my first Zen meditation teacher, Robert Aitken Roshi, who often used haiku in his talks. I had come home tired and hungry and as I sat down to take my first spoonful of soup, I stopped in mid-air as I saw the orange in afternoon sunlight by my plate. The light was golden and the orange perfectly round. All was perfect as it was, and I felt suddenly and totally at peace as I saw "the thing itself" as it was in its nakedness without my overlay of thoughts or opinions, and tears rolled down my face. I had seen the orange clearly, as if for the first time—that was my first experience of haiku mind. The next week the Roshi told me that my experience was a tiny glimpse into awakened mind—which takes a lifetime or lifetimes of practicing meditation or practicing being aware, in order to deepen and incorporate into one's everyday life. As Basho, the greatest haiku master, said, "To learn about the pine tree you must become one with the pine and drop your self-centered view." It was only a glimpse, but it was an opening.

My second experience was "being put on the spot" by my main meditation teacher, the late Tibetan master

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Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche who founded Naropa University. Although he was not Japanese, he greatly appreciated the traditional arts of *ikebana, kyudo,* and haiku. It was 1980 and I had been teaching East-West poetics (including haiku) at Naropa under poet Allen Ginsberg for several years and was involved with Rinpoche's teaching of "dharma poetics": that any poetry can be a vehicle of awakening if done mindfully. It was here that my poetry and my meditation practice began to merge through haiku; I began to use haiku, not just as a literary form, but also as an awareness practice. This was due to Trungpa Rinpoche's ruthless kindness: at the three-month-long meditation retreat with several hundred people, I was "put on the spot." At the end of one of Rinpoche's talks late one night, without warning, he called me up in front of the large audience and asked me to compose a spontaneous poem, a haiku on the three kinds of Buddhism. I was handed the microphone. I was stunned: my mind was blank yet inspired. I was naked and immersed in the moment and simply recorded in words what was there in all of its nakedness. I looked at the shrine next to me and said, "between the altar candles the purple irises' shadows" as the first line; the second line came from staring at the hushed audience, "you look into my eyes, I look into yours," and then feeling my heart pounding, the concluding line, "only the empty heartbeats of the guru and us." It wasn't a perfect haiku or perhaps not even a haiku, but it was a perfect teaching for trusting

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my own haiku mind—of being totally open to the present moment, to what is there. And I felt grateful. I was put on the spot for five nights, but the first night was the real leap into seeing haiku as an awareness practice of the moment.

My third experience was "finding ordinary mind" in Japan. It was 1986 and I went to Japan to study with the late haiku master Seishi Yamaguchi—I initially had the romantic notion to find a Zen-like haiku master, but auspiciously I found a Robert Frost–like haiku master instead. It was in his weekly group class, where we all presented our haiku for correction by the teacher, that I learned how subtle and ordinary haiku really was—and that because it is so ordinary it seems extraordinary. In our discussions about haiku, the teacher and the other Japanese poets were puzzled why I even mentioned the subject of Zen, because for them haiku was about ordinary life: just that, nothing special, that there is absolutely no separation between the mundane and the sacred, things as they are. I then realized that to search for the so-called Zen mystery in every haiku is a mistake and to do so takes away the depth of their personal flavor and ordinary mind context. At that same time I also discovered Chiyo-ni—an eighteenth-century, woman haiku master and Buddhist nun—who was known to have lived *haikai no michi* (following the Way of Haiku in daily life) as espoused by Basho; she always used haiku as an *aisatsu* (greeting) to others and to the world of Nature in her everyday life by staying open to

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the present moment. As I began co-translating her haiku, I saw in her the real possibility of a way of seeing and being in the world—of daily living with this haiku mind, even with our busy lives today.

Over twenty years have passed, yet I am still on this journey. Just last year on my walks by Lake Michigan near my home, where I can feel the vastness of the lake and sky, I realized something further about haiku mind. Haiku mind is the awareness to tune in to the vastness of the moment. Actually to create and appreciate this tiny form of poetry, one needs a vast mind like the sky. This is known in Tibetan Buddhism as *dzogchen*: that our natural state of mind is vast and clear as the sky. When we can pause and relax in the moment, that is our haiku mind: the awakened, openhearted awareness that we can always tap into. Every good haiku captures such a moment and is a reflection of our haiku mind. Here haiku mind includes both mind and heart in a non-dualistic whole, as in the Chinese character for "mind-heart" where there is no separation. And when we are present, we can then see and appreciate the juicy pear or orange on the sunlit windowsill before we pick it up to eat it.

However, as we all know, these uncertain times of our present world call us to go beyond the awareness of just the pear, and to become more conscious and engaged in our world—we can do this by using this awareness of haiku mind as a stepping stone and expand it. We do this by simply

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practicing to pause in the moment. One way is pausing when we read the haiku in this book—for each haiku is a reminder of our innate haiku mind and is a powerful seed that grows into deeper awareness. This in turn leads to more pausing in our daily life when we slow down and take in a few breaths, which allows a small opening to occur, allows us to relax and see things beyond judgment of good or bad, things as they are in their nakedness: the pear in sunlight. For when we can relax our mind, we can feel a sense of open heartedness and peace—and even though small, it will grow little by little like a seed and will naturally give rise to extending out to others and to the world, beyond our self-concern. In this way, haiku and the root of haiku—our natural haiku mind—become a way to plant seeds of peace in our selves and in the world.

• • •

This is not just an anthology of haiku poems, but rather spiritual reflections on 108 haiku—I used 108 because it is an auspicious number in Buddhist thought as there are 108 difficulties to overcome in order to become awakened, and so there are 108 beads on a Buddhist *mala.* The reflective form I used was inspired by the Japanese tradition of the *haibun*: *hai* (haiku) and *bun* (sentences) combined; usually the story or reflection behind the poem. These reflections are medita-

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tions rather than literary analysis. Each of the 108 haiku is a meditative springboard for the contemplation of a specific theme, be it adversity, nowness, or compassion. My reflections are often in a poetic-prose style that are interwoven into a tapestry, using the thematic threads of the poetic, the spiritual, and the political. Hopefully each haiku and each reflection will encourage further contemplation—and will cultivate a sense of awareness, compassion, and peace.

Except for those poets who lived long ago, I've been fortunate over the years to have personally met or known the majority of these gifted poets included in this collection. Choosing the featured haiku was the challenge: matching good haiku to good themes for reflection. There were so many fine haiku poets whose work I wanted to include but couldn't, not just because of space limitations, but because I was not able to make the right match between the fine haiku and the theme for a reflection.

Above all, I have tried to represent a balance of poets: traditional and modern, Japanese and non-Japanese, male and female. Some haiku were my favorites, some by the famous, some by the less known, some by devoted haiku poets, some by those who seldom write or wrote haiku. Of the Japanese selections, I did not include any living poets because I am not as familiar with their work and there are so many fine traditional haiku poets who have rarely or never been presented in English. All the English translations from the

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Japanese were done in collaboration with Yoshie Ishibashi; I hope they reflect some of their original haiku spirit.

Of the non-Japanese selections, I included mostly American haiku poets and some Canadians; I only wish that I could have been more knowledgeable to include more international haiku—the few non-English haiku included are my translated versions. Overall, each of the 108 haiku that was chosen embodies a clear presentation of the moment of now, which is always present when we pause. These haiku inspired me to pause and reflect and I hope they will inspire others as well.

This collection is intended for any reader, of whatever background, religion, or spiritual inclination, for the reflections, although greatly inspired by the Buddhist tradition, are taken from many "wisdom traditions." This collection is intended for any reader, whether interested in haiku or not. Above all, it is intended for any reader who is interested in cultivating awareness and opening the heart. The power of haiku is its ability to plant these seeds within us, to reawaken our haiku mind this very moment, as we gaze upon the pear and the world beyond it.

I originally envisioned this book to be written on a meditative retreat like Thoreau's *Walden*; however, it was written in snatches of respite in between caring for my parents; hopefully these circumstances deepened my view. In addition, several books of spiritual reflections transmitted a spark

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for this book, including *Comfortable with Uncertainty: 108 Teachings on Cultivating Fearlessness and Compassion* by Pema Chödrön and *The Hundred Verses of Advice* by Dilgo Khysentse Rinpoche. If there is any drop of insight in my reflections, it is due to the kindness of my teachers, Buddhist and otherwise, that I have been fortunate to meet, in this lifetime and perhaps others; may this work only be of benefit.

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HAIKU MIND

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1 • Pausing

pausing
halfway up the stair—
white chrysanthemums

ELIZABETH SEARLE LAMB

Pausing is the doorway to awakening. This haiku epitomizes a moment that occurs naturally in our lives, but that we often hurry or gloss over. Haiku awareness is a simple way to slow down and tune in to this fleeting moment, to appreciate what is right in front of us. We pause not only with our body but also with our mind. And sometimes we can be attentive and sometimes we cannot, but that is all right, for the next moment always brings us the fresh possibility to pause and be present again. There are no steps to follow, there is no enlightenment to work toward—there is only the simplicity of relaxing into this very moment that is complete in itself. This naked moment is the only guide that we need to relax

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our mind. We need to trust this: in the midst of our daily life activities, the possibility to slow down, to stop, and then to appreciate naturally unfolds. For a fleeting moment we pause and note the sunlight on the sheets as we make the bed, note the warm sun on our cup as we sip tea, or note the fading light on the curtain as we enter the room. And we let out a breath or sigh. Pausing.

ELIZABETH SEARLE LAMB (1917–2004). The foremost American haiku poet living a life dedicated to haiku, called "the first lady of American haiku." Lamb was one of the founding members in 1968, along with Harold G. Henderson, of the Haiku Society of America and editor of *Frogpond,* its journal. She was also an early president of HSA and an honorary curator of the American Haiku Archives. Her last book was *Across the Windharp: Collected and New Haiku*.

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2 • *Sky Mind*

To see Void vast infinite
look out the window
into the blue sky.

ALLEN GINSBERG

This is Allen Ginsberg's death haiku, written about a week before he died. It is in the Japanese tradition of haiku poets and Zen masters to write "death poems," ideally as a way to keep one's awareness, even if sick and dying, in order to write last words that reflect one's understanding of life. As a practitioner of both meditation and haiku, Ginsberg told me on several occasions how much he admired this tradition and hoped he could do it someday. This "haiku" was actually one of his experimental forms of haiku called "American sentences," originally written in one line.

This haiku is a wonderful reminder of a simple practice in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition called *sky meditation:* look-

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ing up into the vast sky and feeling the large expanse of space, which stops our mind's preoccupation of the moment. The sky is merely a reminder of this openness that is always within us, that we can tap into anytime. Wherever we are, we can always simply stop and look up at the sky, or even imagine the sky . . . and breathe out a long-awaited sigh. For a moment we are back to our natural state of mind, which is as vast and open as the sky; all else is just thoughts and feelings like clouds passing by. In any moment we can come back to sky mind.

ALLEN GINSBERG (1926–1997). An American Beat outrider, one of the greatest visionary poets of the twentieth century. Allen was famous for his long political protest poems, beginning with *Howl* in 1955, yet he was also a lifelong practitioner of haiku as an "awareness practice," which fit in with his Buddhist meditation practice. For a selection of his haiku see the chapbook *Mostly Sitting Haiku* or his *Collected Poems 1947–1980;* for a selection of his experimental haiku called "American Sentences," see his last book, *Death and Fame: Last Poems 1993–1997.*

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3 • Honesty

I kill an ant . . .
and realize my three children
were watching

SHUSON KATO

The microcosm of one ant crawling across the floor and our response to it. "Be honest to yourself; and write what is there." These words are from the Japanese woman haiku master, Teijo Nakamura, given in a rare interview when I had asked her what was the greatest principle of haiku. At first I thought the interpreter had made a mistake, for her reply seemed much too simple; later when I tried to practice it, I realized how hard yet truly profound it was. This haiku reflects the courage it takes to be that honest with oneself in order to become a true human being who lives mindfully moment to moment. As we all know, not causing harm to oneself or others is the basis for creating more peace in our

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own lives and those around us, extending out to the rest of the world. But it can only happen if we are honest and start where we are now, for honesty is the root of this transformation. Starting this very moment with whatever is happening and seeing it clearly with a gentle heart, no matter how embarrassing, how painful, how sad, no matter what: this is the human journey.

SHUSON KATO (1905–1993). One of the great modern Japanese haiku poets, Kato was also a Basho scholar. In the 1930s he was associated with the Ashibi school of poetry and their magazine, founded by Shuoshi Mizuhara, which emphasized a humanist perspective. Later in the 1940s he founded the *Kanrai* (Thunder in Midwinter) journal, and a collection of his haiku uses the same title.

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4 • Compassion

don't hit the fly—
he prays with his hands
and with his feet

ISSA KOBAYASHI

The Dalai Lama was once asked how to teach children compassion in a world full of violence and intolerance. And he replied, "teach them to like and respect insects." For if we can learn to care about something that is tiny, strange, and not always easy to relate to, then we can realize that insects, like everything in Nature, share the same life. And in turn we could eventually realize that all human beings—not just our particular group or country—also share the same life. Haiku is a way to remember how everything is connected in our world, and if we feel connected we will not harm things, but rather care for them. Haiku is often about noticing and caring for the small; more than any other haiku poet, Issa was

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known for his compassion toward small creatures. This was an idea taken from Issa's belief in Pure Land Buddhism, namely that we should not harm any creatures, from human beings down to insects, and that we should have compassion toward them because we are all part of the same life force. Haiku is an apt reminder that in order to nurture our compassion toward other people and the world, we can begin by extending our compassion to all living things in Nature, by starting with insects like the tiny fly. Starting with the small.

ISSA KOBAYASHI (1763–1828). One of the three greatest traditional Japanese male haiku poets, along with Basho and Buson. As a Pure Land Buddhist, he espoused compassion for all living things, perhaps because he himself had a life of poverty and personal tragedy. See his autobiographical haibun collection, *Oraga Haru* (The Spring of My Life) from 1819.

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5 • *Transience*

summer grasses—
all that remains
of warriors' dreams

BASHO MATSUO

War: this haiku expresses its universal truth and could just have been written today as in ancient times. This was written in the seventeenth century as part of Basho's haibun (travel poems) when he was visiting an ancient samurai battlefield of the Fujiwara clan. It reflects his bereft feeling about the human condition; in fact, he said he wept as he looked out over the ruins. This haiku is a deep reflection on the truth of reality, which is by nature transient and fleeting. When we are unable to accept this truth we become distressed. However, recognition of this truth could at least bring a sense of poignancy to all of us human beings, who inevitably experience and witness it. There is even an aesthetic of this recognition

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in Japan called *mono no aware* (the poignancy of transient things). And some meditation masters, such as the Vajrayana Buddhist teacher Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, have said that if we could expand our vision and really understand the naked truth of impermanence, we would be enlightened on the spot. Haiku could be helpful in this regard, for it is able to capture the moment of transience and hold it up to us like a mirror. We are the warriors, we are the dreams, we are the grasses: we are transient.

BASHO MATSUO (1644–1694). The greatest haiku poet in Japanese history. Coming from a low samurai class, he later became a renga master with many disciples, studied Zen, and traveled widely. He took haiku to a deeper level, espousing haikai no michi (the Way of Haiku) as a way of life and a return to Nature. See *Sarumino* (*Monkey's Raincoat,* a renga collection); and *Oku no Hosomichi* (*Narrow Road to the Interior,* a haibun collection). See also haiku translations in R. H. Blyth's *History of Haiku,* vol. 1 and Makoto Ueda's translation *Basho and His Interpreters*—just some among many translations.

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6 • Forgetting the Self

rouged lips
forgotten—
clear spring water

CHIYO-NI

For a brief moment she forgot herself. This is one of Chiyo-ni's most memorable realization haiku. It shows her forgetting her rouged lips—the makeup that was important to women of her time and to women still today—while drinking the fresh water. This haiku epitomizes her unique style, combining clarity and sensuality, but most importantly it expresses the heightened awareness that comes when we forget the self and are present to the moment. If her mind had been worried, preoccupied with her makeup, she would not have been able to really see and appreciate the clear spring water from the flowing mountain stream, nor fully enjoy sipping it from her cupped hands. In that moment it was

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only, "ah! the clear spring water." In the words of Dogen, the thirteenth-century Zen master, "when we forget the self, we can remember the 10,000 things."[1] It is often hard but rewarding to switch our attention away from our self and notice the other, whether it be the tired face of a homeless person on the street corner or the luminous raindrops against the windowpane. Even to practice this a few minutes a day not only expands our awareness, but more important, it reminds us of our true humanity.

CHIYO-NI (1703–1775), or Kaga no Chiyo; her family name was Fukumasuya. One of the greatest traditional Japanese women haiku poets. Born into a scroll maker's family, she studied with two of Basho's disciples, was a renowned renga master, painter, and Buddhist nun. She published two poetry books: *Chiyo-ni Kushu* (Chiyo-ni's Haiku Collection) and *Matsu no Koe* (Voice of the Pine). Known for living Basho's "Way of Haiku." See *Chiyo-ni: Woman Haiku Master* by Patricia Donegan and Yoshie Ishibashi.

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7 • Adversity

violets here and there
in the ruins
of my burnt house

SHOKYU-NI

This haiku has haunted me: the poet's response to her personal tragedy and her original preface to this poem are inspirational, "On my return from Tsukushi at the close of March, I found that my hut had been destroyed by fire. Looking at the ruins, I composed this verse."[2] This haiku addresses the age-old question we all face: how to work with adversity, in our own lives and in this chaotic, imperfect world around us. We cannot ultimately control what happens, but we can control our response to what happens. This becomes the spiritual path for each of us, however we find it. We could cry and rage or deny what happens, which may be part of the process, and perhaps the process the poet went through

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herself before or after she wrote this haiku. Yet sometimes adversity can be an opportunity rather than an obstacle, if we are simply aware of our daily response to things, examine what happens with courage and openness, and possibly reflect upon it as in this haiku. It is not being optimistic or looking for a silver lining, but just seeing the way things are: the burnt charcoal of the wooden house and the tiny flowers growing nearby—to see the paradox, the complexity, how the good and bad are often intertwined. This haiku reminds us how to work with personal tragedy, how to work with natural disasters, plague, famine, and war—how to see violets in the ruins . . . or whatever happens to be there.

SHOKYU-NI (1713–1781); her family name was Yagi. One of the well-known Japanese women haiku poets of the Edo period (1603–1868). A renga master who studied with the poet Yaha, who was a close disciple of Basho. After her husband died she became a Buddhist nun, made a pilgrimage, and created her main work, *Kohaku-an-shu* (White Lake Hermitage Collection).

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8 • Illness and Emotions

As my anger ebbs,
The spring stars grow bright again
And the wind returns.

RICHARD WRIGHT

Unknown to most people the famous novelist Richard Wright used haiku as a comforting awareness practice to get him through his declining health due to amebic dysentery complications the last year and a half of his life. He left a legacy of over four thousand haiku—amazingly, he hadn't written any haiku before then. Written in Paris cafés, written when bedridden, they helped him, as his daughter noted, "to spin these poems of light out of the gathering darkness."[3] In the 1950s, when meditating wasn't as popular as it is now, Wright found a way to work with the dark emotions of his anger and depression, in the ups and downs of his illness, which we all face in ourselves or others sometime or another.

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The writing of haiku, which includes focusing on Nature, helps one do just that: get outside oneself and appreciate what is there. This haiku clearly records how his perception of Nature was clouded by his emotions, and that Nature did not change, but his perception changed when he became mindful and could see clearly again: the stars, the wind, what was there beside him all along.

RICHARD WRIGHT (1908–1960). An esteemed African-American novelist, born in rural Mississippi and died an expatriate in Paris. Wright was an early spokesperson for black Americans; with his novel *Native Son* (1940), he became a major literary voice; other works include *The Outsider, Black Boy,* and *Black Power.* Haiku, taken up in illness the last months of his life, written in traditional seventeen syllables, reflects his relationship to Nature with a universality unlike his other works. See *Haiku: This Other World* (1998).

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9 • *Gratitude*

remembering those gone
thankful to be here—
pond of purple iris

MARGARET CHULA

Gratitude: the word embodies a sacred worldview that is not only transformative but necessary in a world yearning for peace. In a way, this haiku itself embodies a threefold contemplation that we could easily follow as a prayerful reminder any time of the day, perhaps when we first arise or go to bed. Even in the midst of grief for the loss of loved ones, we can remember them gratefully: perhaps a parent, child, or spouse, our ancestral spirits, or those who died recently in a war zone. Remembering them is recognizing our inseparability and our deep connection; we know that without them we would not be here in the same way at all. With the thought of those gone, at the same time an appreciation for

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being here arises—just to be alive and breathing here and now (although not always perfectly), just to simply sit in a chair and feel our back against the wood is enough. It is at this point with an expansive, relaxed feeling of gratitude that we can then see and take in the vast world around us—the pond of purple iris. The beauty of this haiku is that it is really a simple prayer: gratitude for others, self, and the world of Nature—and beyond.

MARGARET CHULA (b. 1947). One of the foremost American haiku poets, distinguished by awards in haiku as well as related forms of haibun and tanka poetry, in addition to short stories. Chula lived in Kyoto, Japan, for twelve years, which deeply influenced her poetic sensibilities and international haiku activities. Her main works include *Grinding My Ink, Shadow Lines, The Smell of Rust,* and *What Remains: Japanese Americans in Internment Camps* with quilt artist Cathy Erickson.

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10 • Awakening

bush warbler—
I rest my hands
in the wooden sink

CHIGETSU-NI

The bird called me out. I wanted to stay asleep under the covers, but the bird called me out. I was lost in a depressed thought and then the bird called me out. An unknown bird from an unknown tree called me out. We've all had this experience of being caught in our comfortable, habitual thoughts about this or that—and then something happens—there is a gap, a crack of space long enough for the sound of a bird to penetrate us, and we are awakened. This is sometimes referred to as a heightened moment of awakening, but actually it is an ordinary occurrence, yet feels extraordinary when we finally tune in to the present moment in all of its vividness. Here the poet found herself awakened from her everyday

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kitchen chores, if only for a brief interval, by the magical and subtle sound of a warbler. There is also the story of Ikkyu, the infamous Zen master–poet of the fifteenth century, who is said to have reached total enlightenment in his twenties while meditating in a boat on Lake Biwa, when hearing the caw, caw, cawing of a crow. The possibility to let the bird call us out, or to let something else call us out, is always there.

CHIGETSU-NI (1632–1708); her family name was Kawai. She was the closest woman disciple and friend of Basho, and one of the greatest traditional Japanese women haiku poets. After her husband died she became a Buddhist nun and lived in Otsu with her brother (and adopted son) Otokuni, a fine poet and also a student of Basho. She was one of the main contributors, along with Basho, to the famed *Sarumino* (*Monkey's Raincoat*) linked-verse collection.

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11 • Sorrow

this world of dew
is yes, a world of dew
and yet . . .

ISSA KOBAYASHI

Sorrow beyond words. In every language the word *sorrow* embodies the same human emotion in all human beings, in all places, in all times—past, present, and future—on this earth. Feelings beyond words—described here by the poet Issa from his own personal tragedy. This is his most famous haiku, supposedly written after his one-year-old daughter Sato died of smallpox in 1818, as recorded in his haibun diary. Over his lifetime he experienced the infancy death of five of his children; besides this, he experienced the death of two wives, and also the burning-down of his house. This poem resonates because it is so real: this haiku was written for all of us who inevitably experience grief in our lives,

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as part of the human condition, of just being alive, of just dying, of just having a broken heart. He knows it is all as transient as "dew," and we know it is all transient as "dew," too, "and yet . . . ," he says. And when we think about it, or don't even think about it, something deep within us, within the human spirit, almost imperceptibly wants and needs to also say, whether in a shout or whisper, "and yet . . ."

ISSA KOBAYASHI (1763–1828). One of the three greatest traditional Japanese male haiku poets, along with Basho and Buson. As a Pure Land Buddhist, he espoused compassion for all living things, perhaps because he himself had a life of poverty and personal tragedy. See his autobiographical haibun collection, *Oraga Haru* (The Spring of My Life) from 1819.

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12 • Simplicity

this spring in my hut
there is nothing
there is everything

SODO YAMAGUCHI

I have always admired Mahatma Gandhi for living simply with very few possessions: a loincloth, a comb, a watch, a fountain pen, a notebook, and a copy of sacred Hindu scriptures—that was about it. And Henry Thoreau, also with only a few possessions, took up experimental living by Walden Pond. But even they did not achieve ideal simplicity: recent historical records show that Gandhi's simple lifestyle was supported by other people's money and energy, and that Thoreau went to Sunday dinners at his mother's house while living at Walden. Yet both men knew the value of simplicity. There is now a trend in postmodern cultures to reconsider this value: to get away from rabid consumerism and get back

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to simplicity. Most of us are weighed down by too much stuff, which is rooted in a consumer culture that emphasizes what we don't have rather than what we do have, which produces discontent. This is mental poverty; real poverty is a different story. This is not to romanticize real poverty at all, but an urging for all of us to live more simply and thus know more contentment. Whether or not the poet really did have "nothing," the haiku points the way to simplicity, feeling it is "everything" just to breathe in the spring air.

SODO YAMAGUCHI (1643–1716). Born in Kai and later moved to Edo (Tokyo), he became acquainted with Basho while studying with Kigin. He was respected by Basho, especially for his knowledge of Chinese classics.

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13 • *Interdependence*

a heavy cart
rumbles by—
peonies tremble

BUSON YOSA

Peonies and humans are equals in the universe. Being part of the East Asian cultural tradition and a Buddhist priest when young, the poet understood this main tenet of interdependency: that the world of humanity and the nonhuman natural world are interwoven and not separate, that there are no separate selves, that humans are a part of Nature and not above it. This is deep ecological consciousness, that all are interconnected more than we realize; even modern physics now sees our planet and the universe as a web of dynamic interrelations. We can see it when we stop and notice even small things as the train rattles by, or the wind picks up, how the leaves on the trees are lifted, as well as the hairs on our

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head. We are touched and touch in return, every moment. This is the so-called "butterfly effect": that even the momentum caused by a butterfly moving its wings in the Amazon will be felt someday, somehow, somewhere—even in Paris or Cairo. It's hard to believe, but a truth we can all experiment with and observe every day. If we understand this, we cannot harm any living thing in the environment, for we are harming ourselves in the process, for there is no ultimate separation; we are all a part of this intimate cause and effect. This is the simple ecology of a peony trembling . . .

BUSON YOSA (1716–1784). One of the three greatest male haiku and renga poets (along with Basho and Issa), Buson was also a great painter of the literati art style and a master of vividly elegant images, which are evident in his haiku. He also illustrated Basho's haiku. Born in Osaka, he was at first a student of Kikaku, a close disciple of Basho. He later promoted the "back-to-Basho revival" that restored haiku to its former state. Some works include *Ake Garasu* (A Crow at Dawn) and *Shin Hanatsumi* (New Flower Picking).

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14 • Humor

the warbler poops
on the slender
plum branch

ONITSURA UEJIMA

Humor has always been a saving grace for the life dramas of human beings and is supposedly one of our unique traits—perhaps we have a humor gene in our DNA. It's been well documented that laughing is not only good for the spirit but good for bodily health: inner organs, cells, and especially the heart. Humor cuts through our fixed thinking and brings a fresh perspective so we can relax our mind and laugh. Not cleverly joking at others, but genuinely sharing warmth. Laughing from not taking ourselves so seriously for we know that ultimately nothing is permanent or solid, including our own thoughts and emotions. Actually seeing the illusory nature of reality is cause for laughter, for we are relaxing with

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the unknown and just seeing things in their naked state. My father expressed this another way, as something simple to follow. He would always tell me as a child, "Remember to laugh at yourself and cry for others," which is a good reminder to be open to others and not take ourselves so seriously. This haiku should change any preconception that haiku are only about "serious" things; haiku are always a witness to the surprising nature of things, however we find it, in the lightness of the moment: plum flowers, and oh! the droppings of a bird!

ONITSURA UEJIMA (1661–1738). His fame in Japan approached that of Basho. The son of a wealthy sake brewer, he began writing haiku as a child and studied with Kiin and Soin, both disciples of Shiko, who was a disciple of Basho. He uplifted haiku, using "sincerity" as the most important element, which was admired by Buson. His haiku is known for simplicity and earthiness, as expressed in his treatise on haikai, *Hitorigoto* (Talking to Myself), which was a best seller of 1718.

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15 • Nature

no flower can stay
yet humans grieve at dying—
the red peony

EDITH SHIFFERT

The truth of the way of Nature is not nice and cozy, but rather neutral and even tough. Anyone who has ever been stranded out in "wild Nature" quickly learns this fact; or anyone who has ever been in a natural disaster such as a flood or earthquake knows too well the unpredictable, unbiased nature of Nature. Another truth of Nature is that while it can be quite awesome, vulnerable, and beautiful, the beauty of a flower is not made for us: its fragrance, its color, its shape are the survival of its species. A prime example of this is the supposed "first flower" that was recently found in a rock fossil in southern China, the "arti fructus" from about 130 million years ago. The botanists said that the formation of the flower's

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beautiful petals and all were just the primordial expression of the flowering plant's better survival for the next passing generation. Above all, the truth of Nature is simply change and impermanence. We humans know that "no flower can stay," but we usually grieve about it—and yet, the poet who wrote this haiku in her eighties has accepted this impermanence, as perhaps a Taoist or Buddhist or as a flower—and there is nothing left to do but to be in and appreciate this way of Nature.

EDITH SHIFFERT (b. 1916). A foremost American haiku poet of her time, she is better known for her longer Imagist poetry. Kenneth Rexroth said, "her poetry possesses a reverence for life and gratitude for being, her being and all being." Born in Canada, she lived in Hawaii, Alaska, and, since 1963, in Kyoto, Japan, where she is known as a "cultural treasure." Her main works include *Kyoto Years, Clean Water Haiku* (with Minoru Sawano), *In the Ninth Decade,* and *Pathways.* Also, she was editor and co-translator, with Yuki Sawa, of *Haiku Master Buson* and the *Anthology of Modern Japanese Poetry.*

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16 • *Co-emergent Wisdom*

after the rain
bomb craters filled
with stars

JOHN BRANDI

There is a quote that has helped me for years, taken from the Buddhist text *The Sadhana of Mahamudra*: "good and bad, happy and sad, all thoughts vanish into emptiness like the imprint of a bird in the sky."[4] As much as we might dislike change when things are good and in our favor, we appreciate change when things are bad and not in our favor. How much more comforting it would be if we could, as in this quote, recognize that all things—whether good or bad, happy or sad—will ultimately fade, along with our thoughts and judgments of things, and that really on some level everything is coemergent. Usually this is not easy to see, but sometimes we can see this clearly when an incident occurs as in this

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poem: bombs creating craters where houses once stood and people once breathed and lived. Yet sometimes even within that destruction something else is occurring: rain and the stars' reflection within the destruction; the next morning the rain might be dried up by the sun and the stars' image gone too, like the fading "imprint of a bird in the sky" as it flies away into the distance. And we watch these things and our thoughts about these things arise and fade away . . .

JOHN BRANDI (b. 1943). At home in the New Mexican desert for years, from where he ran the Tooth of Times Press and sometimes ventured off to South America or Asia, Brandi enfolded his life encounters into thirty books. One of the leading American haiku poets as well as a travel writer (especially of haibun), he is also an editor, essayist, painter, and concerned activist. He received several awards, including a National Endowment for the Arts poetry grant. Among his works are *Weeding the Cosmos: Selected Haiku, In What Disappears,* and *Water Shining beyond the Fields.*

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17 • Auspicious Coincidence

the shell i take
the shell it takes
ebb tide

VINCENT TRIPI

The brilliant natural magic of the world is here all the time. When everyday coincidences occur more and more as in this haiku, it is a sign that our mind is beginning to slow down, relax, and be in the present moment. When we are present our senses are more attuned to the environment and the environment to us. And we can let in and enjoy the subtle energy of the water taking the shell as we take it. Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche explains, "The world communicates to us because we're available, like a flower in spring. Conditions are ripe and the flower opens. Wisdom and compassion attune us to life, and the environment responds."[5] The environment is always presenting us with a new circumstance to learn from,

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be it a book, a shell, a lover, or a friend. The more we realize how everything is interrelated, and the more our minds are open, then the more auspicious our lives become. Not only to notice the ebb tide flowing around the shells, but to notice when all conditions are ripe in our lives: when it is time to act—to take a nature walk, to paint the house, or to have a child. Rinpoche sums it up: "Being present is where all power and magic lie." Whether in the city or at the seashore—there is magic to be found.

VINCENT TRIPI (b. 1941). One of the foremost American haiku poets, one living the "Way of Haiku" as a naturalist, as a Thoreau. He served as the head of the Haiku Poets of Northern California, but he now lives in the northwest woods of Massachusetts, where is he a part of a writing community whose members write from a spiritual perspective. He is also an editor and runs his own small press called tribe press. He is a prolific author of haiku books including *Haiku Pond: A Trace of the Trail and Thoreau, Tribe: Meditations of a Haiku Poet,* and *Snow Falling on Snow: A Collection of Poems about the Buddha,* and recently, *monk & i* and *paperweight for nothing.*

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18 • Beyond Terrorism

in the deep fires
I saw the way
a peony crumbles

SHUSON KATO

A peony crumbled, a skull cracked open, and the metal twisted in the fire's bloody explosion. It could be a suicide terrorist bomb attack; it could be a "shock and awe" air raid; it could be genocide in Darfur; it could be the Auschwitz death camp; it could be the Catholic Church's Inquisition, burning books and heretics; it could be the racist bombing of a Little Rock church; it could be the Ku Klux Klan burning crosses; it could be the bombing of Hiroshima; it could be any act of terrorism or violence throughout human history. Here the poet is depicting his experience of the air bombings of Tokyo in World War II, in which his house was burned down and he and his wife were separated from their children.

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Whether it was a real peony or merely a metaphor, it is an unforgettable image of that incident, during which more civilians were killed than in the later atomic bombs. And so today we are left to ask ourselves, how can we face these terrible, fearful things? Perhaps by seeing the truth of the way it was and still is. Perhaps by knowing that fire does not quench fire. Perhaps by choosing not to be a part of—or sanction—this destructive cycle. Perhaps by standing up against violence in ourselves and others always, whether on a small scale or large. Perhaps by seeing the way a peony crumbles. Perhaps, someday, somehow.

SHUSON KATO (1905–1993). One of the great modern Japanese haiku poets, Kato was also a Basho scholar. In the 1930s he was associated with the Ashibi school of poetry and their magazine, founded by Shuoshi Mizuhara, which emphasized a humanist perspective. Later in the 1940s he founded the *Kanrai* (Thunder in Midwinter) journal, and a collection of his haiku uses the same title.

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19 • Basic Goodness

first light
everything in this room
was already here

CHRISTOPHER HEROLD

Nothing can hide from light—it touches everything equally, as does the sun and moon and stars beyond. Light is just there as the sky is there, as the earth and all the elements are there. This is sometimes referred to as "basic goodness" or "things just as they are," in their primordial natural state. Not good as opposed to bad, but "good" because it is unconditional, of the natural order. Sometimes we can see this and sometimes we can't; if we can, some sense of appreciation arises as in this poet's experience—in the light, finally seeing what was there all along—the absolute beauty of simplicity, of naked reality. It reminds me of an incident some years ago when my mother was released from the hospital after an op-

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eration and on the way home, though still weak, she looked out the car window and simply noted, "How pretty. Look at the sunlight against that brick wall." That was the same moment of appreciation. And perhaps that is also why we appreciate painters such as Vermeer, whose paintings of dark spaces are illuminated with a pure light; or Van Gogh's painting of the *Starry Night over the Rhone,* in which the energetic light from the brushed canvas pierces everything, including us. And we see again.

CHRISTOPHER HEROLD (b. 1948). A student of Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, he has been immersed in Zen practice and teaching for many years. One of the most prominent and active American haiku poets, his books of haiku include *Voices of Stone, In Other Words,* and *A Path in the Garden.* He is the editor of the international haiku journal *The Heron's Nest.*

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20 • Paradox

picked
by an old woman's hand
herbs green and glowing

SOEN NAKAGAWA

This haiku poet, mostly known as a Zen master, said of his own haiku, "It represents a world where plus and minus are one . . . [a world] of absolute contradiction. To be dying is to be living, and to be living is to be dying. Death and life cannot be separated. They only have different names. . . . Here an old woman, a grandmother, is picking some herbs. As soon as she picks them, new shoots come up. I did not intend to create a haiku expressing the Zen viewpoint, but this is how things really are."[6] The same could be said of this world and the so-called spiritual world. It is all intertwined. Perhaps the most famous reference to this paradox is contained in the Prajnaparamita Hrdaya Sutra (Heart Sutra), where it is said:

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"form is emptiness, emptiness itself is form."[7] It is not that the form is only material and the emptiness spiritual, but these two realms are *one,* and yet at the same time beyond one. And when we reflect upon it, something deep inside of us imperceptibly knows this truth but cannot speak it. So we are left with green herbs held in an old hand.

SOEN NAKAGAWA (1901–1984). One of the most famous and eccentric Zen masters of the twentieth century. He was the abbot of the historic Ryutaku monastery and a key figure in the transmission of Zen Buddhism from Japan to the Western world. Among his students were Eido Roshi (his dharma heir), as well as Robert Aitken and Philip Kapleau, who became two of the first Westerners to teach Zen in America. Nakagawa was also known for his dynamic calligraphy and haiku. See *Endless Vow: The Zen Path of Soen Nakagawa* by Kazuaki Tanahashi.

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