

Haiku and Haiga Contemplative Practice Mini-Retreat

Haiku is a “word picture and meditation” in the traditional Japanese form of 17 syllables. Contemporary Haiga amplifies the haiku text with a harmonizing digital photo. After quieting and becoming attuned to our surroundings, you will be guided to collect words that convey your sensual engagement in nature, from which you will create a haiku. Eventually, you may choose to take a photo to complement your word picture. This practice is designed to help you be present to all your senses and develop awareness in nature.

Scent	Taste
Sound	Touch
Balance (in or out of balance)	Sight
Movement (or stillness)	

- Relax, breathe, and look around. Start with scent. Can you smell anything right now? If so, write it down in the scent box. If not, do you see something that you know has a scent? Write down the first thing you notice with a distinct scent.
- Close your eyes. Let your mind wander back to a *memory of a scent*. As before, jot down what comes to you in the scent box. If no scent memory surfaces after a while, move on to your sense of sight, look around and write what you first notice in the sight box, followed by a *memory of a sight* sparked by what you wrote in the sight box.
- Repeat the process for each box: taste, sound, touch—including an immediate sense and *a memory*.
- When you come to balance, look for something in this moment that feels either in balance or out of balance, then look for the same dynamic *in your memory*. When you come to movement, look for something that is either moving or particularly still. Write it in the box. What *memory* of movement or stillness is activated? Again, record it in the box.
- Once you have one or two words in each box look them over carefully. It's time to make connections. Write down two things from your boxes that resonate with each other. They may come from the present or the past, from the same or different senses.

- Condense the significance of first descriptive word into a short phrase. Likewise, condense the second descriptive word to its essential meaning in a short phrase. Grammar is not important here. Capturing the essence of the emotional connections among the descriptive words is. Is one phrase simpler than the other? Does one phrase evoke more complex feelings and insights?
- Use these two phrases to create a 3-line haiku. Make the simpler conceptual phrase either the first or last line, and use the more complex phrase for the other two lines. This will take time and several drafts. Experiment with words, phrases and emotions. Brevity is the heart and soul of haiku. Try for a 5-7-5 syllable per line form, but it is not essential.
- Once you are satisfied with your haiku, read it aloud to yourself. Observe your emotional response to this creative exercise. If you have time now, or later, you may wish to take a digital photo with your camera to complement the poem. That process is called Haiga. Typically, a haiga will superimpose a haiku somewhere on the photo background.
- Later, feel welcome to return to these sensual words and create additional Haikus.

Questions for Reflection:

- How did noting your sense change your awareness of each passing moment?
- Are there any threads of connection between your haiku and your spiritual journey?
- Are there insights from the *subject* of your haiku or the *process* of creating it that you want to think more about?
- What, if anything, will stay with you from this exercise?