

INVITATION TO CONTRIBUTE

Haiku poems – a form of therapy?

From the Editor, Peter Limbrick

Do you know haiku poems? They originate in Japan and are the shortest form of poetry in the world. Each has three lines with five syllables in the first line, seven syllables in the second and five in the third – only seventeen syllables altogether.

It is a powerful form of poetry and the shortness of haiku poems has nothing at all to do with their significance. Effective haiku have depth and feeling. At their best they are a genuine expression of the writer's own feelings, are more intuitive than intellectual, are simple but not trivial.

Here are some poems written by a master of the art, Ryokan, who lived as a hermit in the mountains of Japan in the eighteenth century. Although they are translated from the Japanese with the number of syllables inevitably changed, they show the power of the format.*

Not much to offer you –
just a lotus flower floating
In a small jar of water.

Back and forth, back and forth,
all day the bent old man
Carries water for the parched rice seedlings.

Late at night, listening to the winter rain,
recalling my youth –
Was it only a dream? Was I really young once?

No begging in the town
again today.
The snow falls and falls.

Why could haiku poetry be relevant to IQJ readers?

I believe that writing one's inner thoughts can be therapeutic for some people at some times. It certainly works for me. Keeping a diary, writing letters that you are never going to post to people about whom you have strong emotions, and composing poems can be a way of sorting a tangle of thoughts and feelings into something usable, it can be a release valve, a way of coming to a realisation, a new thought, a point to grow from.

This sort of writing means being alone in a quiet place and digging down deep, never sure what is going to come up. This is true of writing haiku. There has to be much exploration of feelings in order to be able to express them in just seventeen syllables. It might appeal to you, it might not.

If you are already writing haiku, or if you think you might give it a go, please send the ones you like best to IQJ to share with others. To give you a starting place if you are new to haiku, and to inspire you that you can surely do better, I offer some of mine here.

Baby milk by tube.
Sucking not required. Hard for
parents to swallow.

Newborn, rushed away,
Intensive Care, *'Just next door'*.
Twenty thousand miles!

Moon in the window.
Children out of bed. Again!
No more sleep tonight.

Walk one mile with me
in my shoes, with my burden.
Then you will know me.

* *One Robe, One Bowl – The Zen Poetry of Ryokan*.
Translated and introduced by John Stevens.
Weatherhill. New York and Tokyo. First edition,
1977. Twelfth printing, 1996.

Please send your haiku to p.limbrick@virgin.net
and let me know if they are for publication in IQJ
– and if you want to put your name to the poem
or be anonymous.

And, if you have time, please pass this invitation
to people you think might be interested.