

# **a collection of clouds**

**Zen haiku and other poetry**

**debra jan bibel**

Elie Metchnikoff Memorial Library



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a collection of clouds. Zen haiku and other poetry

Published by the  
Elie Metchnikoff Memorial Library  
230 Orange Street, 6, Oakland, California 94610-4139

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**Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 96-61629**

FIRST EDITION

Printed in the United States of America



*To the memory of Baruch and Bassya*



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*Books by Debra Jan Bibel*

*Milestones in Immunology. A historical exploration*

*Freeing the Goose in the Bottle. Discovering Zen through science,  
understanding science through Zen*

*a collection of clouds. Zen haiku and other poems*



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## Preface

An eon ago, at the wise old age of 22 just before entering graduate school to earn my doctorate in medical microbiology and immunology, I imagined myself fulfilling the standard progression of academic scientists: a vigorous period of laboratory experimentation leading to some noteworthy discoveries, a rise up the academic ladder furthered by a bevy of supporting graduate students, a quieter interval of philosophical or historical dabbling, and retirement as an honored educator. I would have a loving mate and two clever, respectful children, a comfortable house, and a secure moderate income. It was my version of the Great American Dream.

Needless to say, life does not develop on such a flimsy foundation. The details of the aberrations need not be mentioned, but by-and-large I did produce a few modest ripples in the pool of scientific knowledge. Although not obtaining a professorship, I worked for several periods in a medical school as a basic science and clinical investigator, and now hold unsalaried faculty rank. My interest in the history of science came earlier in my career than anticipated; I fell victim of bibliomania. The growing collection of books, articles, and photographs on the history of my discipline led to the founding—purely in jest—of the Elie Metchnikoff Memorial Library. It soon became a regional resource. I also began and continue to write columns on the history and philosophy of microbiology and immunology for a local professional society.

Meanwhile, like many of my generation, I have engaged in personal noetic exploration. It began long before delving into sex, drugs, and rock-and-roll as an adult academic hippie, and continues today in informal studies of consciousness. The University of California at Berkeley did not have a undergraduate requirement for a minor curriculum to accompany a major, but, looking back, my selection of courses in the humanities would have comprised



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one in comparative religion. The spiritual seed planted in 1964 with a de facto course on Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, and which germinated and grew during the American cultural revolution, eventually blossomed in 1981 when I encountered Seung Sahn, a Korean Zen master. I took to his school of Zen immediately. A seven-week pilgrimage to the monasteries of Japan, Korea, and Nepal anchored me in Buddhism. (Having been born, raised, and educated in the Pacific-facing San Francisco Bay Area with many Asian friends and acquaintances, I suppose that I was exceedingly well primed.) Later, I avidly studied the haiku of both old and modern masters to develop a unique, nontraditional style as part of my multifaceted Zen practice. This book is the fruit of an old tree. Perhaps my writings will serve as a dharma seed in the reader, and so continue the cycle.



Almost unwittingly I am surfing a familial karmic wave. (These may seem strange words from a scientist, but I find reductionistic genetic explanations of heredity, even when coupled with broad-stroked environmental behaviorism, to be lacking. Life is far more complex.) My great-grandfather was a rabbi, but his son, although undergoing scholarly religious training and receiving ordination, refused to continue in his footsteps. My grandfather Baruch [Boris] Bibel (his name literally means blessed book) could not accept the God of the Torah! He instead became a woodworker, and made a lifetime study of the pantheistic nature philosophy of a distant relative and namesake, Baruch Spinoza. This book, too, is an echo. Charmed by things Japanese and influenced by an anthology of poorly translated haiku, my mother Bassya (“daughter-of-God”) composed and published between 1969 and 1977 four books of numerous short poems in Western style. As for my father—ethicist, cultural historian, and storyteller? My nephew, a news anchor and journalist in radio, seems to be *his* harmonic.





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## Acknowledgments

Sydna Armstrong is more than my student in haiku and Zen Buddhist dharma; she is a wonderful friend. On numerous occasions she has ably advised me in improving certain of my poetry. She has my thanks for her suggestions as well as her support and camaraderie. I particularly appreciate her kind Foreword to this book. Michael Welch, haiku publisher and critic, provided helpful advice in reviewing some samples of my work. Although he missed the point of my nontraditional perspective, his comments did spur me to reconsider and revise more than a few poems. A special appreciation goes to the Kwan Um School of Zen and its founder, Seung Sahn, a highly esteemed Korean Zen master, whose personality and teachings brought me to the serious examination and practice of this unique approach to Buddhism. Without this foundation I would have never ventured into the various Zen-associated arts, including haiku poetry.

DJB



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### About This Edition

*a collection of clouds* has been considerably expanded and thoroughly revised from the earlier less formal booklets that I have distributed from time to time among friends and relatives. This publication should be regarded as definitive.

The limited first printing consists of 60 copies.



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## Foreword

Sydna Armstrong

“What’s this?” she suddenly asked, as she whipped a pen from her purse and held it under my nose. Somewhat taken aback by the abruptness of her gesture but also by the simplicity of the question, I snapped back the obvious answer: “A pen!” “Incorrect!” she retorted. “You’re attached to words!”

This was my first encounter with Dr. Jan Bibel, and I knew that moment we were to become friends. We had been introduced by a mutual friend only half an hour earlier at the Tower classical record store in Berkeley. Her quiz occurred at the point in our conversation when I asked Jan about this Zen she practiced and if she would explain it to me.

That day I had learned that as well as being a scientist, philosopher, artist, and photographer, Jan was also a poet. Now here we were several weeks later, hunched over several sheets of her poetry on my living room couch. But as she began to read her three-line verses aloud, I hardly heard these concise lines as poetry. After all, hadn’t I been immersed in Shelley and Keats and Shakespeare these past years? Where were the metaphors? The beauty? The song? For an instant I was transported back to the record store: baffled before Jan! Yet, as she continued to read, I attempted to share more deeply in the creative process, willing to pick up the echoes implicit in her words. And as I listened, I began to see. Jan had refined her works into touchstones of suggestiveness; each poem was a recording of the essence of a moment in which she had linked nature to human nature. These lines had demanded much from Jan, and now they were demanding much from me. By nightfall she had departed, and I was aware that deep within me something had begun to rumble: an urge to learn more about these Zen haiku.

In the weeks that followed, Jan introduced me to meditation and its application to the writing of haiku. T. S. Eliot’s line

came to mind often at first: “For the most of us, there is only the unattended moment. . .the distraction fit,” and I smiled and winced simultaneously as I recognized myself as one of the “most” crowd. I was a Westerner involved in an Eastern practice that obviously wasn’t working. But then—something happened. Inadvertently I came upon a Robert Frost poem, *The Pasture*, a favorite from childhood. Frost, like Zen, was pointing to clarity of mind with all its ramifications, and grateful for the serendipity of the poem, I dedicated myself anew—to train attention and to take responsibility for it. As I did, certain ordinary objects at times assumed a strange aesthetic significance, even now, I remember the spark of these, my first “haiku moments”.

Five years have past since Jan first sat on my couch sharing her poems. She continues to critique my haiku while remaining both guide and friend. And the poems she originally read to me? I reread them often. As my understanding deepens, (again in the words of T. S. Eliot) her “hints and guesses”, her fresh insights stun me anew. These poems and the new ones she has included in this collection display her gift for synthesizing the particular and the universal, the minute and the vague, what is and what is not. They continue to inspire and remind me that wholeness can happen in the most ordinary way. Joseph Campbell once stated: “I don’t think we’re looking for the meaning of life; I think we’re looking for the experience of being alive!” Mediated through her personality, Jan’s haiku impart *her* experiences of being alive. I encourage you, the reader, to open to their message as she points the way to come to your *own* discovery of the endless source. Through her art she echoes the words of Robert Frost: “You come too.”

She would certainly join me here in sharing with you the spirit of the eighteenth-century poet, Ryokan:

Who says my poems are poems?  
My poems are not poems.  
When you know my poems are not poems,  
Then we can speak of poetry!



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## Introduction

Every morning Jui-yen called out, “Master!” and replied to himself,  
“Yes!”  
“Always be awake!”  
“Yes!” was the answer.  
“Do not be deceived by others!”  
“No, never!”

Which is the correct master?

*Koan from the Wu-Men Kuan, the Gateless Gate*

Encountered my self the other day and decided to conduct an interview. . .

**Q:** This small book of poetry claims to be of “Zen haiku”. Why the distinction? Is it not true that haiku is closely associated with Zen?

**A:** Zen haiku, for me, differs from other poetry by its being the succinct impression of an incident, mood, or essence that has been actually perceived, not merely observed, in a natural situation. Indeed, drafts of poems must be completed shortly thereafter while insights are fresh. Because these poems are more than verbal snapshots, they must convey the clear moment-to-moment mind of the witness. (For contrasting examples, this book includes a section of haiku imbued with *thought*.) The poem arises simply and spontaneously by being alert and—like a young child—finding wonder in everything and—like a wise old grandparent—grasping their proper relationships and functions. The work then becomes



transcendent. Zen haiku, hence, are not about Zen. They *are* Zen—or at least start as such—and cannot be forced, as some school exercise. For this reason, the very act of experiencing–writing Zen haiku becomes both tool and fruit of Zen practice. Although it is far more difficult, photography, another artistic approach to Zen that I frequently apply, is conducted in much the same way.

Haiku grew out of a literary and courtly game of linking verses, called *renku* or *renga*, where one poet in the party would compose a verse suggested by the preceding one. The leading verse, the *hokku*, eventually stood alone. This convivial and lighthearted origin of haiku persists in its Chinese characters, p'ai chou, which translate as “play verse” or “fun words”. The Japanese poets of *renku* and many early haiku depended on their memories and imagination. In the early evolution of haiku the poem became more serious, adopting the themes and style of *tanka*, poems of five lines that stemmed from the Taoist poetry of China. Matsuo Basho, the seventeenth-century pioneer of haiku, was also the patriarch of Zen haiku, for in addition to using his imagination, he wrote about events and perceptions that occurred in his life, particularly during his travels. He was influenced by Zen practice and the poems of Chinese Buddhist and Taoist hermits deeply submerged in nature. Haiku would have inevitably emerged around nature themes of the human condition and the environment, for Japan is culturally defined by the nature animism underlying Shinto and by Taoist-stamped Zen.

**Q:** The acts of masters of Zen who specialize in calligraphy, martial arts, or tea ceremonies are recognized as especially aesthetic, powerful, pure, and efficacious. Are Zen haiku, hence, of better quality than other poems composed by mere reflection and whim?

**A:** No, nor are they worse. The point of Zen haiku is entirely personal for the poet. The reader will respond to a well-crafted, meaningful poem whether it originated through immediate



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perception or the exercise of imagination or thought. The latter method may indeed produce a poem that evokes the spirit of Zen to most readers; on the other hand, even haiku arising through Zen mind may utterly fail to communicate. I do find, however, that nature provides a greater bank of patterns. The vignettes of Zen haiku will probably be more varied and interesting.

**Q:** The form of haiku has been an object of contention for decades. What is your view?

**A:** Zen requires both discipline and wisdom; thus, the form of the poems generally must meet an arbitrary standard, yet allow exceptions when efficacy is improved. Japanese traditional haiku are of 17 phonemic characters divided into three lines in the form of 5-7-5. A phonemic character does not necessarily correspond to an English syllable. It might even indicate an interjection or punctuation. I find it futile to attempt a precise Japanese format in another language, particularly one as expansive and exacting as English. Our language has the article *the*, for instance. This said, haiku are minimally defined as brief, one-breath poems divided typically into three lines of short-long-short form. It does not matter whether they are of 10, 12, or even 18 syllables, so long as a standard has been chosen. Although I admit that it is on the long side, I elected a 5-7-5 format as target, not a rule. I feel that many, certainly not all, poems much shorter than this are too anorexic. A poem should communicate directly, if not readily. Many modern haiku poets write without any standard, providing great flexibility and freedom, but this laxity has the hazard of supporting laziness and a loss of craft. They should instead consider developing their own format. For instance, Lucien Stryk, a student of Zen and an esteemed Zen poet, refuses to cast his succinct poetry under the rubric of haiku.

On the other hand, too many restrictions can stunt creativity. One well-known example is that traditional haiku in Japan incorporates code words for season. This should not be a

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requirement since the season is integral to the experience; it is enfolded in the observation. Other aspects of structure are well recognized, such as the pivot point or pause and the balance, contrast, and rhythm of the poem. There are no rules here; it is a matter of art within the craft. I have recognized that, since translators of Japanese haiku in English usually are unable to incorporate the alliterations, onomatopoeia, double meanings, and sometime puns found in the original, Western readers have acquired a false impression that haiku is supposed to be stark and austere. Zen masters are not known to be morose; they are playful in their teaching. Harking back to their roots, haiku are open to these poetic devices as in Western traditions, and I especially enjoy discovering them as the poems are cast on the page.

The use of metaphor, simile, and anthromorphisms, however, is traditionally shunned, although I find that on occasion such descriptions are scientifically accurate. Furthermore, many demand that haiku be objective, but both Buddhist and physicist know that objectivity is a false concept and that observer and object are interdependent processes. Our language, our philosophical worldview are also fundamentally metaphoric. Therefore, although interpretations are to be avoided, perceptions and emotions, our humanity—however substantially empty they may be—are valid subjects of observation. *This insight is another sharp distinction between Zen haiku and conventional poetic haiku.* If sadness comes with an occasional gray day, then the Zennist will acknowledge it. If the Zen poet at first mistakes robins for flowers on leafless trees, then such a description is *not* a metaphor. The discovery of the fallacy becomes a revelatory psychological and Buddhist teaching!

Haiku traditionally do not include titles since the poem is complete in itself. I do here. Why? Since the days of Basho, poets have drafted their works in their journals, which provide personal context. My poetry *is* my personal journal. Commentary in the form of a title allows me to record additional information.





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Q: Why did you prepare this book? Surely, there are enough examples of haiku available for any reader. Are your works special? Has not everything been said already?

A: Yes, everything has been said, perhaps a thousand times over, generation after generation, civilization after civilization. We ignore the classics and do not seem to listen to history. It is as if we cannot truly accept anything unless it is from our own time and in our particular place and culture. In our present high pressure society of accelerating technological change, sound bites, packaged time intervals, and a ceaseless deluge of images, we have little respect for oldness and have little opportunity to slowly savor a quiet, introspective moment. There is something tantalizing about the new, even if it is the *n*th translation of the Tao Te Ching or yet another recording of a Beethoven symphony.

The production of this book has been motivated out of practical, personal, and pedagogical concerns. A book has greater opportunity to reach a potential readership than a specialized journal sent to already committed subscribers. Moreover, a book is an individual statement. Poetry, like art and music, is deeply personal; nevertheless, its creator has a social need to share the insights and to be acknowledged. No, my works themselves are not special, but my work is. This book is largely to encourage attentiveness to one's surroundings and to one's self. The poetic pen and tablet should be as ubiquitous as the camera and the cellular phone. When not fully engaged in a work task—in work *samadhi*—we should be in walking meditation, keenly alert and selfless even when witnessing ourselves. Of course, with living in an urban, often high-stressed region, time away in a quiet rural environment promotes openness and fresh insights; most of my poems concern events during hiking and camping. It is a matter of contrast: a nomad, farmer, or other rustic resident might find city life as invigorating and contemplative. The Zen Buddhist path has strong elements of psychological experimentation. Beyond a creative outlet and verbal art, the single act of experiencing-writing



haiku is an introspective instrument, an exercise more potent than chanting or reading the sutras.

For the reader, a haiku is a subtle seed that meshes and develops in the mind as a perspective-altering complex. The very simplicity of the poem induces a similar decompression of our life. The chattering brain is taken aback. A haiku, like a novel or radio drama, transports the reader to a virtual place, entirely familiar, because unstated details are filled in by imagination and experience. Haiku pass directly to our heart, where they can act slowly and secretly. We learn to appreciate the fleeting, the small event, the moment among a lifetime of moments. If the reader is philosophically inclined, then the underlying essence and meaning of each poem can be analyzed. Haiku can also be self-referential. If mere words can create new worlds—dreams—how much of the normal cosmos we derive from our senses (which in Buddhist philosophy number eight—the sixth being thought) is likewise mentally constructed and conditioned, hence, empty?

There is also a religious aspect. Zennists have a psychological principle of *turning words*, an expression or even event only meaningful for the individual that, when heard, read, or witnessed during the course of an ordinary day, shatters the extreme a-conscious spiritual tension (Great Doubt), such as developed on “becoming” an assigned koan. The resulting collapse of a student’s delusional and illusional foundations of self and of reality (Great Death) opens to satori, to enlightenment. Haiku could easily have this capacity. The *Ah!* of the aesthetic haiku experience could suddenly lead to *Aha!* As Louis Pasteur argued, “Where observation is concerned, chance favors only the prepared mind.”

**Q:** In this dialogue, who asks the questions and who answers?

**A:** *a collection of clouds.*



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**a collection of clouds**





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## Glimpses

[1987 - 1990]

Decaying deer corpse,  
fracturing eroded rocks:  
two songs of winter.

Chattering birds  
herald the golden dawn.  
I, too, lift my head.

Night fog pseudopods.  
miss this mountain tent refuge.  
Ah! Warm hands and tea.

Cloud cools the mountain—  
Black butterflies motionless,  
silent gray snow.

Hawk glides the sky  
along hidden thermal paths,  
watchfully silent.

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### Sierra Meditation

Three basking lizards,  
frozen in afternoon sun.  
One wears clothing.

Awakened! Muktak  
clacks here in the forest?  
Crafty woodpecker!

Meandering ant,  
let me help. The path you seek  
is not on my leg.

Moonless sky ablaze,  
ten thousand stars light this trail  
back to camp.

The frigid night gone,  
trees and boulders stretch  
creaking.

Dawn canoeist,  
oar gentle in the water—  
duckling broods.



Howling spring wind —  
protected, a fern and I  
share this granite nook.

Unruly loud youth  
yet pause at evening to hear  
concertos of frogs.

Scampering chipmunk,  
why do you choose redwoods,  
ignoring pines?

A deer blocks the road!  
Clouds of thought dissolve.  
Stark mountain silence.

### The Computer

Electron-inspired words of dots—  
phosphorescent fireworks.  
Gone.



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### Christmas Break at Point Reyes

Sun bright, clear crisp air,  
forest quiet and hiker  
alone.

Frozen brittle grass.  
Why, sparrow, do you cheer?  
Ah, sunbeam delight!

Silent white aircraft  
leaving streamers in its wake. . .  
The crescent moon!

Odd looking dung  
amid the trail. . .moves!  
Such a daring slug.





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### Endings

Shadow of the pen  
drifting with the setting sun—  
words lost in darkness.

This silence of dusk—  
even ambulance sirens  
cannot disturb it.

A bird stands sentry  
until, behind western clouds,  
the last beam is lost.

Mount Tamalpais  
with fleeting crown of moon horns!  
Each turn a surprise.



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### Point Reyes in May

Hiking companions—  
Blue damsels and red dragons  
weave across the path.

Along the trail,  
a pale blue iris  
alone in the wind.

Shadow up the tree!  
Startled, raccoon and human  
gaze at each other.

With great flaps and cries,  
the heron spirals atop  
the tallest lake pine.

### Street Stories

A hovering fly,  
silent, spinning left and right,  
waiting. But for what?

Leaping from trees,  
two squirrels make their highway  
telephone wires.



More so in such gray skies,  
flowers shine  
beckoning.

Infant's cosmos:  
a big red balloon brings forth  
Buddha's laughing eyes.

#### Desert Quartet/Northwest Nevada

The dawn horizon—  
Along desert mountains glow  
red clouds and red rain.

Desert stillness  
but for broadcasts of  
grasshopper wings.

The desert:  
freedom to roam and to sing  
for swift coyote.

Tedious sagebrush,  
but the shape of mountains!  
Old man Lao Tzu smiles.

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## Urban Renewal

Soft autumn rain  
rushing along the new roof  
drops to the floor.

First autumn shower:  
Parched earth snaps and pops  
until it puddles.

Tall telephone poles  
gaudy with names and numbers,  
I vote for rain clouds.

Through the roar of jets,  
a rustling of shade trees,  
their leaf showers.

Atop Piedmont's heights—  
Machine murmurs still assault  
both eardrum and heart.

Hairy spider  
waiting in its round web—  
waiting still.



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Sitting on porch steps,  
two laughing women look up,  
then down as I pass.


This peace oasis  
amid autos and asphalt:  
a cemetery.

Dry red leaves  
sailing the winds  
to lands unknown.

Whispering breeze,  
yet the curtains perform  
a spirited dance.

Constant companion,  
however alone my path:  
footsteps.

Ghost buildings emerge  
through gray mists of a gray dawn—  
a pause in the rain.



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Down from pine branches  
raindrops drum the umbrella:  
December scherzo.

Faceless eyes peer out  
walking wombs of wool and down—  
winter solstice night.

In hot winter sun  
soft white flakes yet fall—  
fruit blossoms!

In hard dry winds  
walking on red maple leaves:  
each step a crunch.

Its life fuel consumed,  
the candle flame crackles out.  
Vestiges of smoke.



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## Of No-time and No-place

[1991 – 1992]

High moon of midnight—  
blue, its full light ends a year,  
starts yet another.

Flowers of trees  
leafless in their winter—  
Oh, robins!

Three airborne seeds caught  
on a spider's hidden strand—  
their travels suspended.

West wind and feathers  
in perfect balance—  
hawk motionless on high.

Passing a courtyard  
where sounds of fountain cascades  
beget a smile.



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Feline moaning  
shatters the slumber of night—  
sun in the window.

Such a night, this night:  
Venus, Jupiter, and Mars  
gather with blade moon.

An ocean of fog  
shortens the day, hides the night.  
Sound of guitar.

The last rains of spring.  
In warm windless air, a scent—  
sweet firewood smoke.

The shadowless land—  
yet another summer day  
under numbing fog.

Even more wondrous  
among smooth purple and green:  
the withered brown bloom!





A hundred dead leaves  
scurry along quiet streets—  
icy Eastern winds.

Red midnight sky:  
Both rich and poor share tears.  
Smoky stillness.

Amid grounds now cold,  
yet erect, still organic—  
chimney and charred tree.

Branch hopping sparrows  
send down pink avalanches  
in gray winter rains.

Its green but a trace,  
a flame upon the dark earth,  
this fallen leaf-clock.



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## Of Mountains and Forests

Big Basin chipmunk:  
with every note it cries  
its tail dances.

Reaching China Camp  
already occupied—  
one million black flies.

Evening, not yet night:  
sunset red clings to the tops  
of redwood giants.

Still forest:  
sound of a falling leaf  
stops the hiker's steps.

In the fire's glow,  
a buck nears, stands guard until  
doe and fawn have passed.

Closed—a darkened leaf,  
open—an orange flower:  
butterfly wings.



Come bikes or babble,  
both deer and I flee deeper  
into the forest.

Up Mount Diablo  
green and free of urban din,  
strange birds, new songs.

### Traveling

Desert wilderness:  
Roads are no barrier  
for spinning dust devils.

A mountain haven—  
roar of creek, birch tree meadow—  
but for these cold bones!

Rapid pulsing wind  
suddenly above rise, fall—  
a blackness of crow.

Leaving Taos canyon:  
against the dark creek torrent,  
one clump of white reeds.



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In the last light of dusk,  
in mountain shadow, yet glow  
serpentine train tracks.

Rapt in his reading,  
the old man in his old car  
ignores the roses.



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## A Collection of Clouds

[1993]

Dead of winter:  
Not a beetle, not a fly  
to grace the web.

Ah! Sunbeam warmth.  
Ah! Hummingbird.  
Ah!: Ah!

Another birthday—  
Were they there yesterday,  
these many gray hairs?

A small daisy  
inspected by a toddler—  
the greatest treasure.

Fire invisible,  
the Bunsen burner soothes  
spring-chilled cheeks.

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### Return to Big Basin

Forest camp—  
soap bubbles soar the winds.  
Pop! Pop!

In forest silence  
unexpected loneliness  
chills the afternoon.

A blackened penny—  
but for its roundness, hidden  
among pine needles.

Restless night.  
I spot the raccoon stealing breakfast  
too late.

Under overcast sky  
the lone tent.  
Sound of distant owl.



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From high pine boughs  
raindrops drum the tent,  
clang the pot.

Creek Trail—  
a soggy roadway  
for salamanders.

### North Coast

Cattle guard crossing.  
In water below the slats:  
tadpoles!

Three golden poppies  
next to a large white stone  
perfectly posed.

Eyes on the trail,  
a sudden shadow of hawk  
freezes my steps.



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Alone in silence—  
the joy, the sorrow roaming  
the Lost Coast.

Crescent moon at sunset.  
Now I may ready the bed,  
await the stars.

On the beach alone.  
Looking back at my footsteps  
already gone.

Where river meets sea:  
surf, wind, yet stillness to hear  
sand grasses squeak.

Cresting the hill—  
Mt. Tamalpais!  
Home is near and soon.





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## Dried Flowers

[1994]

Last leaves of one,  
buds and blossoms of another.  
Paschal moon.

Jagged gusts lift  
the corners of my mouth and  
a butterfly.

Patch of sun,  
dawn flashing of distant leaves:  
April wind.

In fading light,  
planet-star Jupiter  
as the kettle beckons.



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### Spring Retreat

A vast forest—  
yet bees and beetles, flies and ants  
come to me.

Now in shadow,  
forest bees leave the table,  
birds sing of evening.

The creek's roar,  
drawing away all thought.  
Yet urban unease.

High Sierra slopes—  
absence of white but for  
their clouds churning.

The fisherman's cast—  
Suddenly, my childhood!  
Too many bones.

Awakening.  
Was it present yesterday?  
Scent of decay.



On lake so wide  
but one pair of ducks  
distantly call.

Heavenly latticework:  
cloudy strands from jets  
beyond sight, beyond sound.

Sunbeams reveal  
millions of tiny flies.  
Whence, to where?

Again this morning:  
copulating mosquitoes.  
Better than biting.

Each climbing granites,  
standing for a better view—  
gray squirrel and camper.

The crackling creek,  
Pure and raw, but for  
three Pepsi cans.



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The camera, oh!  
Left behind. But, ah!  
This pen, this paper.

Mountain lake:  
its color, its texture,  
each moment anew.

For silence I came.  
Only stillness of sound I found.  
The heart unfulfilled.

Granite slab—  
atop a crack, a pine grew  
but withered.

The squirrel hopped closer  
and closer to inspect  
the sitting gray robe.

Rising to depart—  
three bows to the squirrel  
no longer there.



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### Return to Reyes

Walking into shade—  
sounds of coolness: birds and brook  
and echoes, echoes.

In shaded forest  
one pine aglow with morning,  
one bird in song.

Along the trail,  
picking blackberries  
soft and sweet.

Becoming each  
Chirp. Snap. Rustle. Flutter. Hum.  
of mountain forest.



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### Turning the Wheel

Middle age  
doldrums and disappointments.  
Summer fog again.

So soon? So soon?  
First red leaves on the maple,  
Labor Day.

### Seung Sahn's Winter Solstice Dharma Talk

The icy church  
melts away with mirth, save for  
his Cheshire cat grin.



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## In the Gallery of Blank Canvases

[1995 - 1996]

New Year's Eve again.  
Alone again, but for sounds—  
breath and passing cars.

Behind the high wall  
barren plants before spring.  
Shadowless sky.

Rain's soothing sound  
against windshield and roof—  
motionless travels.

Garden gate ajar. . .  
Trumpeting an early spring:  
daffodils.



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Drawing the drapes back. . .  
Fireworks!  
A white blossomed tree.

Weeks of gray and gloom  
now blue and yellow,  
I rush outdoors.

### A Cemetery Stroll/New Jersey Blues

Lovers kissed amid  
grand headstones and stately tombs  
eroding.

The pine grove rumbles  
a funeral parade of cars,  
but birds still sing.

Leon died. I feel. . .  
nothing — for my memories,  
his art yet live.





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### Drizzle and Mist

Snail hordes  
cross the path unaware of  
my awkward steps.

Spring — early or late?  
A hummingbird, perched atop  
the yet leafless tree.

Along streets hushed  
birds and wind chimes resound  
till the next shower.



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## Washington Snapshots

### *The Hirshhorn*

Such paintings! Such sculptures!  
I visit them  
again and again.

### *Paradise Almost Lost*

The distant journey  
across a warm spring day marred—  
thoughts of the morrow.

### *Georgetown*

A patio lunch  
more tasty in leaf-filtered light,  
sounds of water.

### *Aerospaced Out*

Though they now hang still,  
they flew into history,  
into our hearts.

### *The Sackler Exhibit*

Village elegance:  
the basketmaker's craft.  
None for sale.