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Moon of the Swaying Buds: A Spiritual Autobiography

Gail Sher
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Form in poetry can be very powerful. This book will either introduce readers to the Haibun form of poetry or remind readers of its power. The author has selected a Japanese prose-haiku combination to echo her own interior journey. On each page, an original haiku or tanka mirrors Sher's journal entries. These forms (the haiku usually denotes an independent tercet of 5-7-5 syllables; the tanka is generally a 5-7, 5-7-7 line) were used by Basho in his travel diaries in the mid-1600s.

Even as a child, Sher thought about spirituality and yearned for beauty. Self-consciously aware of the life around her, the author stood before her mirror "to see if I feel something," after hearing the whispers "Grandpa Herman is dead. He committed suicide."

Hoping to find solace, Sher, as a young adult, became involved with the beginnings of Zen in the United States. Shunryn Suzuki, who is credited with bringing Soto Zen practice to the west, selected Sher as only one of the ninety-six people he ordained in America. Having loved the discipline of writing in high school, the author was drawn to a monastery where, she writes, "I relish my project. Whereas I am not able to control the weather, the schedule, the long hours of zazen, I can easily control these few tools."

Her development in practice did not come easily. She struggled with monastic life and with anorexia nervosa. Dealing with her own shoplifting (which she considered a symptom of her anorexia) she wrote haiku: "stuffing creamers in her bag turning. leaving-the woman's eyes." Eventually she left the monastery, attributing her decision to "my own introversion."

Sher has previously written *From A Baker's Kitchen* and *One Continuous Mistake: Four Noble Truths for Writers* as well as eleven collections of poetry. She's currently at work on *The Intuitive Writer: A Path Toward Deeper Understanding*. In writing *Moon of the Swaying Buds*, she hopes to share with other women what she has learned about "striving to discover and accept themselves on any spiritual path." Her quiet meditations and unrelenting honesty are apparent on every page.

PAM KINGSBURY (March / April 2002)

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