

Take a Deep Breath: The Haiku Way to Inner Peace

Edward Ryan

Sylvia Forges-Ryan

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For the Ryans, poetry, like meditation, like life, is all about breathing. In this strange hybrid of poetry, meditation, and self-help, the husband-and-wife authorial team pairs each haiku with a guided meditation sequence, urging readers to concentrate on the moment or the movement, whatever small sensory awareness reminds readers that they are alive and living in a deliciously sensual world.

Psychotherapist Ryan and haiku poet Forges-Ryan divide the book into sections, organized around the seasons, indicating the cycles of life and of emotion, and the profound way in which nature interacts with and shapes the human psyche. Each haiku encapsulates a moment, poignant in its transience. The poems and meditations guide readers to the transient nature, both joyful and melancholy. In the section called winter, the authors address loss.

Morning frost

expecting her voice

I unlock the door

This haiku focuses on expectation and the knowledge that the expectation will surely not be met. The expected one will not be found. The poem encourages readers to consider loss in their own lives; the meditation suggests ways in which readers might accept the loss and live a mindful life, thereby lessening future regrets. Much of the technique requires users to be open to the experience and ready to answer questions for themselves. It seems particularly appropriate in a time when people are looking for some version of faith. By looking inward, the book suggests, one might find something to have faith in as they taste, hear, touch, or smell the things that surround them.

Summer heat-

every string on the violin

out of tune

Even seemingly negative things, like the heat of summer, force people to slow down, and, as Ryan says, put aside the violin and simply relish this moment in which the reader, like the persons in the poem, need do nothing more than wallow in this enforced languid moment.

While much poetry offers solace, the effect of this book is twofold. Readers can enjoy the simplicity of the poetry, be moved by the experience as it is read aloud, and focus inwardly on the many repercussions it might have to the way readers approach their lives.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (January / February 2003)

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