
Bahá'í Haiku

Yoko Ishihara

Haiku poems, short expressions from the writer's soul, have achieved well-deserved worldwide fame. National Spiritual Assembly member Yoko Ishihara has penned many Bahá'í haiku, several of which are presented here in translation along with her explanatory comments.

Spring On my first pilgrimage to the Bahá'í World Center in November 1978, I stood alone in the garden behind the Shrine of the Bab and opened my prayer book. I was struck by the beautiful singing of the birds which sounded like a chorus of angels. These birds spoke the same language as the birds in Japan.

*The sacred tree
is lined with birds
warbling in the universal tongue.*

Summer Arriving in Israel at the Tel Aviv Airport, which faces the desert, I expected to see scenes of arid desolation. Instead, I was surprised by olive groves and the spray of sprinklers. In Haifa at night, the golden dome of the Shrine of the Bab floats in mid-air like a tethered globe. No garish lights spoil the night.

*Standing
beneath the cool starlit skies,
no neon lights
in this Holy Land.*

Autumn The prison in Akka where Bahá'u'lláh and His followers were held is now a sanatorium, and stands overlooking the Mediterranean just as it has for centuries. We saw only a small metal cot in His prison cell on that cold drizzly day. Both the ocean and the town of Akka were wrapt in a dark, gray mood. Prisoners here had no hope of regaining their freedom. Birds flying over this town would fall dead to the ground. Such a fearsome place is now transformed into a most holy site.

*The heart shudders
to hear
that no bird
would fly over this land.*

Winter There is no place named "Martyr's Square". Entering the city through a dilapidated gate, I came upon a courtyard surrounded by buildings. Perhaps the fountain here once flowed with ample water, but now it was dry and wintry.

*The fountain
in the Martyr's Square
has run dry.*

The last day of my pilgrimage. It was now early December, and the skies were still dark and cold at six in the morning.

*Hastening to the Holy Shrine
as dawn approaches --
a shawl to keep warm in.*

Having said prayers of gratitude and farewell, I left the Shrine of the Bab. Suddenly, tears were streaming down my cheeks. I covered my face with my shawl and stood motionless. A young German woman in our group of pilgrims was on her way to the Shrine. Seeing me, she stopped and quietly stroked my shoulders. Feeling the warmth of her hand, I thanked her with my eyes, then stood listening to the sound of the pebbles under her feet as she made her way to the Shrine.

*Prostrated
in prayers
and lamentations
and whiteness of breath.*

UNESCO and the Bahá'í Faith

Hiroshi Tsunoi

Abstract

This presentation reviews the development of the UNESCO organization in Japan, and analyzes some of the difficulties which the movement has experienced. The first UNESCO group was founded in 1947. Only one year later there were 50 local groups, and by 1957, there were 70 local groups. This rapid growth was due to the fact that the aims of UNESCO -- the establishment of world peace and fellowship -- coincided with the philosophy of the new Japanese constitution and the sentiments of the Japanese people. Those who started the groups had experienced war and wished only for world peace. Given this background, we must ask why UNESCO has not played a more significant role in post-war Japan. Perhaps one explanation is that the different groups developed according to the ideas of their founders. However, when younger members took over, they did not have a strong sense of the groups' purpose or function. Consequently, the groups tended to lack vitality and did not serve as sources of new plans for future activities. It is suggested that local UNESCO groups must generate ideas and plans, and present them at the national congress. The national organization should then synthesize a dynamic general plan which can have an impact on Japanese society.