

Wondering.... What is

The last line of my haiku?

Grateful.... ..breathing
^
still

Below is how this poem is incorporated in [J's the novel](#) (Book 5).

We are seated around the quiet glowing embers. Rosh Akishige stirs them with a long stick, letting little flaming embers dance skyward. Jacques is speaking in a whisper about the birth of philosophy: "Kierkegaard said that for us moderns, philosophy is born in existential fear and trembling. He so admired Aristotle, for whom philosophy was born in awe and wonder."

"Wondering." Prem Deva mutters aloud. "What a wonderful word. Both thinking about, and thinking and feeling with wonder." She smiles as she images her teacher Ramakrishna chuckling.

Akishige continues to stir the embers. "You know, in Zen, we have death haikus. Maybe we should each try to write a death haiku. We could begin with Prem Deva's word, 'Wondering.' Wondering, in wonder, about our lives, our death, its meaning." He turns to Lin Shao, "O Taoist master, what say you, would this be a worthy task for our seven sages of the Safed bamboo grove."

Lin Shao merely bows with a sly grin.

"Inshallah." Al Hazrumi begins a chant, repeating the word over and over, and starts to curl upward into a slow moving dance as he stands and begins moving and weaving in and around the fire. "You're asking what is the last line of our life, our story. That is up to Allah." He twirls again, hands raised to the sky.

"Tea's ready," Rev. Noel calls to us. "Chamomile with a touch of ginger." He pulls the large kettle off the fire and pours out eight cups. "I like the idea of our life as a haiku, and a poem as haiku reflecting our life, and death."

Aikshige, who started the conversation, sits quietly. I watch him, seeing his still, effortless breathing. He who can face life and death with stillness. As I look at those before me, I find myself dizzy. My mind is whirling with all the knowledge and intelligence and wisdom these individuals contain; my body is swaying as I try to follow the movements of Al Hazrumi. And to reconcile the peace and joy in his quick twirling movements, with the slow, deliberate dance of Lin Shao when he "embraces" Tiger and returns to mountain; with the stillness of Akishige "just sitting." Can these pieces of the puzzle ever fit together?

I realize my mind is wandering as I sit in wonder. As usual, to try to bring order to chaos, I pull out my pen and paper. Haiku. 5 syllables, 7 syllables, 5 syllables. Simple meaning, complex meanings, simple meaning. What is it like to be alive and still; dead and still? What is the transition moment? Can I think about these things with joy, or will there always be a fear and trembling? I think of the Modeh Ani, the prayer of thanks; of the Shabbat, a monastery in time. I begin writing....

*Wondering.... What is
The last line of my haiku?
Grateful....breathing
^
Still*