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SOME POETIC THOUGHTS ABOUT THE DILEMMA OF MATERIALISM VS. SPIRITUALITY

- A. "Futilities of futilities!--said Koheleth--futility of futilities! All is futile!
What profit does man have for all his labor which he toils beneath the sun?
A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth endures forever.
And the sun rises and the sun sets--then to its place it rushes; there it rises again.
It goes toward the south and veers toward the north; the wind goes round and round, and on its rounds the wind returns.
All the rivers flow into the sea, yet the sea is not full to the place where the rivers flow, there they flow once more.
All words are wearying, one becomes speechless; the eye is never sated with seeing, no the ear filled with hearing.
Whatever has been is what will be, and whatever has been done is what will be done.
There is nothing new beneath the sun!"
--translation from The ArtScroll Tanach Series, Mesorah Publications, Ltd.

In his commentary to the Siddur Rav Avraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935) wrote:

"Literature, painting and sculpture give material expression to all the spiritual concepts implanted in the depths of the human soul, and as long as even one single line hidden in the depth of the soul has not been given outward expression, it is the task of art [avodat ha-umanut] to bring it out" (Olat Re-aya, II, 3).

And:

"Better is a handful of quietness,/than both the hands full of labour /and striving after wind."(4:5-6)

“The words of the wise spoken in quiet/Are more acceptable than the cry of a ruler among fools.” (9:17)

- A. William Wordsworth was an English Romantic poet who lived from 1770 to 1850. He composed the following sonnet when he was 32 years old (1802) in response to the Industrial Revolution, its materialism and its distancing from the natural world.

The World Is Too Much With Us

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
 Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;
 Little we see in Nature that is ours;
 We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
 This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
 The winds that will be howling at all hours,
 And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
 For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
 It moves us not. Great God! I'd rather be
 A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
 So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
 Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
 Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
 Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.*

*(The narrator would rather be a pagan worshipping an outdated religion so that when he gazes out on the ocean and the meadow, he might feel less sad. He harkens back to mythological gods like Proteus, who takes many shapes, and Triton, who soothes howling sea waves, shaped like a horn).

- B. As an art form, the Japanese poetic form of haiku lend itself beautifully to the expression of internal tension. Consider your own dilemmas. After we have reviewed haiku as an art form, we will write our own and share them with each other.

What Is Haiku?

Many people believe that writing verse in a 5-7-5 syllable pattern means—*ta da!*—they have created haiku.

The simple definition of modern haiku may include:

- three non-rhyming lines that total seventeen or fewer syllables
- a “free form” sensibility similar to free verse
- a seasonal image
- brevity
- *kigo*—words attributed to specific seasons—that haiku poets can use as shorthand to quickly convey the time of year in the poem

C. How to write haiku:

Present a moment of awareness: Behind the simple wording and sparse imagery of haiku is a moment of epiphany. Sometimes the reader must be an active participant in the poem and determine what the enlightenment is. It’s there: elusive, yet in view—the *aha!* moment of unexpected realization.

Use juxtaposition: A good haiku poem offers a big idea in a small package. Two juxtaposed images will often augment, challenge, and define each other. Metaphor and simile should be used carefully and sparingly.

Engage the senses. A haiku doesn’t just paint a picture of an image; it invites readers to inhabit an image through the senses.

Use a light touch. While classic haiku can be pensive, it can also feature double meanings and humor. The core message of the poem hinges on the way the reader interprets the word or phrase in question.

Include only what is essential. A great haiku does not have any unnecessary words. Capture the moment and say what you mean as succinctly as possible.