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JAPN 306 The Japanese Mind

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Q1) Within the Japanese culture there is a common occurrence in which nature is the center of thought and the inspiration of countless creations including the Haiku. Thoughts provoked by the beauty and aesthetics of nature tend to be some of the foundation of the Japanese mind. Haiku is almost completely centered on the way all elements of nature and emotion come together. Within the three-line poem, one must put at least one word or a slight sense of the season. Expression of nature through a Haiku reveals the poet’s true feelings and allows the reader to feel those feelings significantly. In the video it stated that if one can imagine the haiku moment of the poet, it can release a flood of deep emotion.

Something special was when the haiku poets in the video visited each place that Basho also visited and they were able to compose haiku that allowed them to feel in a way Basho may have been feeling when he wrote his haiku. Each place that these poets stopped was naturally different. Nikko provided both sunlight and rain. The feeling the place gives you can depend exactly on the season and the weather. Sesshoseki provided many stones and statues which could symbolize death and yet life at the same time.

Haiku is compared to a form of art, a painting even (Yasuda, p. 126). The images and emotion it paints in one’s mind is even more extraordinary than just looking at a real life painting. Allowing one to create their own pictures and thoughts in their mind is genuinely unique. This “unique” response to nature seems to be a part of the Japanese essence. This imperfect introspection can be seen in so many forms in the Japanese culture. The way nature and the importance of each season is emphasized in countless Japanese creations can portray how haiku fits so well into this Japanese cultural equation.

Q2) The four seasons are intricately involved in the Japanese culture. Each season reveals a new set of colors that provoke certain emotions and certain emotions provoke the usage of season specific colors. In the video about seasonal Japanese colors, it showed how each color represents a part of nature during a certain season. In the spring light greens and pale pinks are used. These colors give people the sense of the springtime. It seems important that Japanese people feel in exact ways. It is customary to have a strong awareness and feeling of each season. It is the way of Japanese thinking and rooted in the culture.

The Shinto religion seems to emphasize nature in every which way. The whole religion is entwined with nature and in many ways is also related to the Japanese sense of beauty. As humans on this earth, we should attempt to enhance our time here with beauty (Keen, p. 28). From the videos it seems that through Japanese artwork, culinary creations, religion, and even buildings, nature is incredibly present. And within this presence there is a grand beauty. Everything is so intricate and perfect, however not perfect in the way that everything is symmetrical. Things are perfect because they were made with flaws that resemble beauty. This also resembles nature.

Nature is magnificent. Trickling rivers in deep green valleys to loud rushing waterfalls in the mountains. Lush plants give earthlings oxygen to breathe. It is glorious in nearly every way and yet it is imperfect. No truly organic thing is identical or perfectly symmetrical. Everything varies with a vast uniqueness. With this, the imperfect is perfect. It is natural and tangible.

Nature is also something that can perish. Trees can be burned and flowers can wilt. Something is to be said about the way the Japanese culinary artists create flower-shaped sweets with such precision. Each is beautiful and yet unique. These lovely treasures will either be consumed or they will rot. If nothing were to perish, then it would remain forever and its significance would decrease. It is something special and temporary that one must take full advantage of when it is around. In contrast to everlasting worthlessness is the example of the Japanese cherry blossoms. They bloom once a year and are only in full bloom for less than a week. After this the glorious moment is over. However, there is even beauty in the perishability of the blossoms. As the seasons go by, the tree changes by growing leaves and blossoms and then shedding them. Buds on these trees create an atmosphere of positive anticipation (Keene, p. 39).

The importance of nature is also portrayed through Japanese fabric. Kimonos often translate the love of nature and the four seasons through paintings of seasonal flowers with seasonal colors. They are even washed in fresh water, making the colors bright. In the video kimonos were described as being quite fashionable to wear according to the season. For example, one must wear a kimono that represents the summer right before the beginning of summer. This also creates an anticipation of the coming season.

Q3) I find it beautiful that nature and the four seasons are so valued in the Japanese culture. It is a rare state of mind in America and I think if more individuals were to value these things there would be a greater appreciation for the surrounding world. To genuinely value the earth is so important because it essentially gives us life. We take from it to survive and incorporating it into our lives on a deeper level through writing or reading poems such as haiku would increase its significance in our thoughts and emotions.

I think there is also something to be said about how much thought and effort is put into everything. Many Japanese creations take time and skill. The anticipation of the final product is of great emphasis. It is also like this in nature. The anticipation of each season can make people excited or feel certain emotions. Today’s world in America is so fast-paced. Many are impatient and do not care about the moments of anticipation. I think it would be a breath of fresh air to take our time and actually look forward to special moments in life. It makes everything unique and worthwhile.