



# KOKORO

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Dreams of Japan



## About This Issue

# *Dreams of Japan*

The invitation to come and lecture in Japan was unexpected, but gladly accepted. It was a business trip, nothing more. Until I arrived – and immediately felt I'd come *home*.

The plans had been a year in the making. I was to speak in 11 different cities with only a few days off. We landed first in the northern city of Sendai. During the cab ride from the airport to the city center, as the countryside swept by, I knew I would return with my camera.

These images are from several trips – but from one recurring feeling – I belong in Japan. Or perhaps better said, Japan belongs in my heart – what the Japanese call the *kokoro*. I dream of Japan often; I dream of *returning* to Japan always.

Perhaps Lafcadio Hearn will not protest too much if I paraphrase (almost word for word) from *Kokoro*, his 1895 book of Japanese life. He explains this important Japanese term far better than I ever could:

**The entries comprising this volume treat of the inner rather than the outer life, – for which reason they have been grouped under the title *Kokoro* (heart). Written with the above character, this word signifies also *mind*, in the emotional sense; *spirit*; *courage*; *resolve*; *sentiment*; *affection*; and *inner meaning*, – just as we say in English, 'the heart of things.'**

#112

Dreams of Japan

# Dreams of Japan



Brooks Jensen

Perhaps reincarnation can explain it — why a boy from Wyoming connects so deeply with Japan. Perhaps in a former life . . .









For us photographers, our images form a sort of visual diary — where we can retrace our life and see more carefully.

However, my photographs from Japan feel like a whisper from a deeper past — from another life, from a time before I was born, from an ungraspable mystery just beyond memory. I can't explain it, but I *sense* it.









Not *deja vu*, but I've been here before. I *know* this life. It is in my very bones — my Wyoming bones. But how can that be?

Can a dream be real?















Familiarity, I guess — that's what I feel. A connection with the *aesthetic*.

For example, I don't read Japanese, but in my mind I can mimick the brush strokes of its calligraphy — a mental dance in ink or stone — as though I've written this language my whole life.

三箇座令法久住院西堂全祈彼  
行 考 宗生

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三箇座令法久住院西堂全祈彼  
九月五日

三箇座令法久住院西堂全祈彼  
九月五日  
於北叡山行院  
瑜和香長生敬白

三箇座令法久住院西堂全祈彼  
九月五日  
瑜和香長生敬白

三箇座令法久住院西堂全祈彼  
九月五日  
瑜和香長生敬白



千里  
同風

立花

立花... 先生... 治十二年... 櫻井... 立花... 先生... 治十二年... 櫻井... 立花... 先生... 治十二年... 櫻井... 立花... 先生... 治十二年... 櫻井... 立花... 先生... 治十二年... 櫻井...

昭和六年十一月三日

王...

And light — there is no light like the glow of shadows through a *shoji* screen.

“An empty space is marked off with plain wood and plain walls, so that the light is drawn into its forms, dim shadows within emptiness. There is nothing more. And yet, when we gaze into the darkness, though we know perfectly well it is mere shadow, we are overcome with the feeling that in this small corner of the atmosphere there reigns complete and utter silence; that here in the darkness immutable tranquility holds sway.”

~ Junichiro Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows*





酒塞苦又世真  
正藏不系養精神

醉先佳入双枕夢  
醒去却過一砂

京世入書





I've listened to the *shishi odoshi*  
— its slow, rhythmic splash/knock  
to scare away the deer.





御堂前



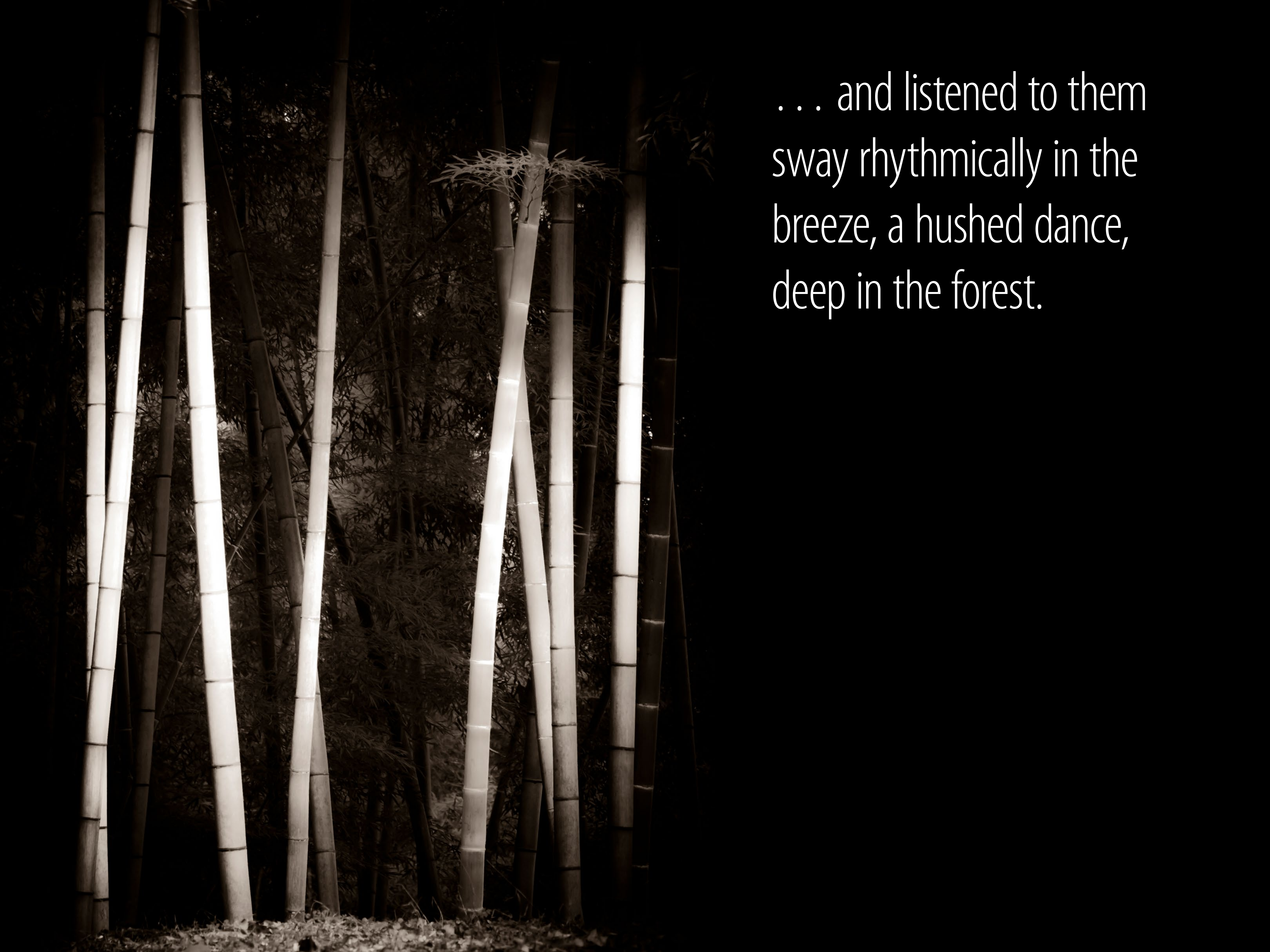
I've walked the path up to the bamboo grove. . .











. . . and listened to them  
sway rhythmically in the  
breeze, a hushed dance,  
deep in the forest.











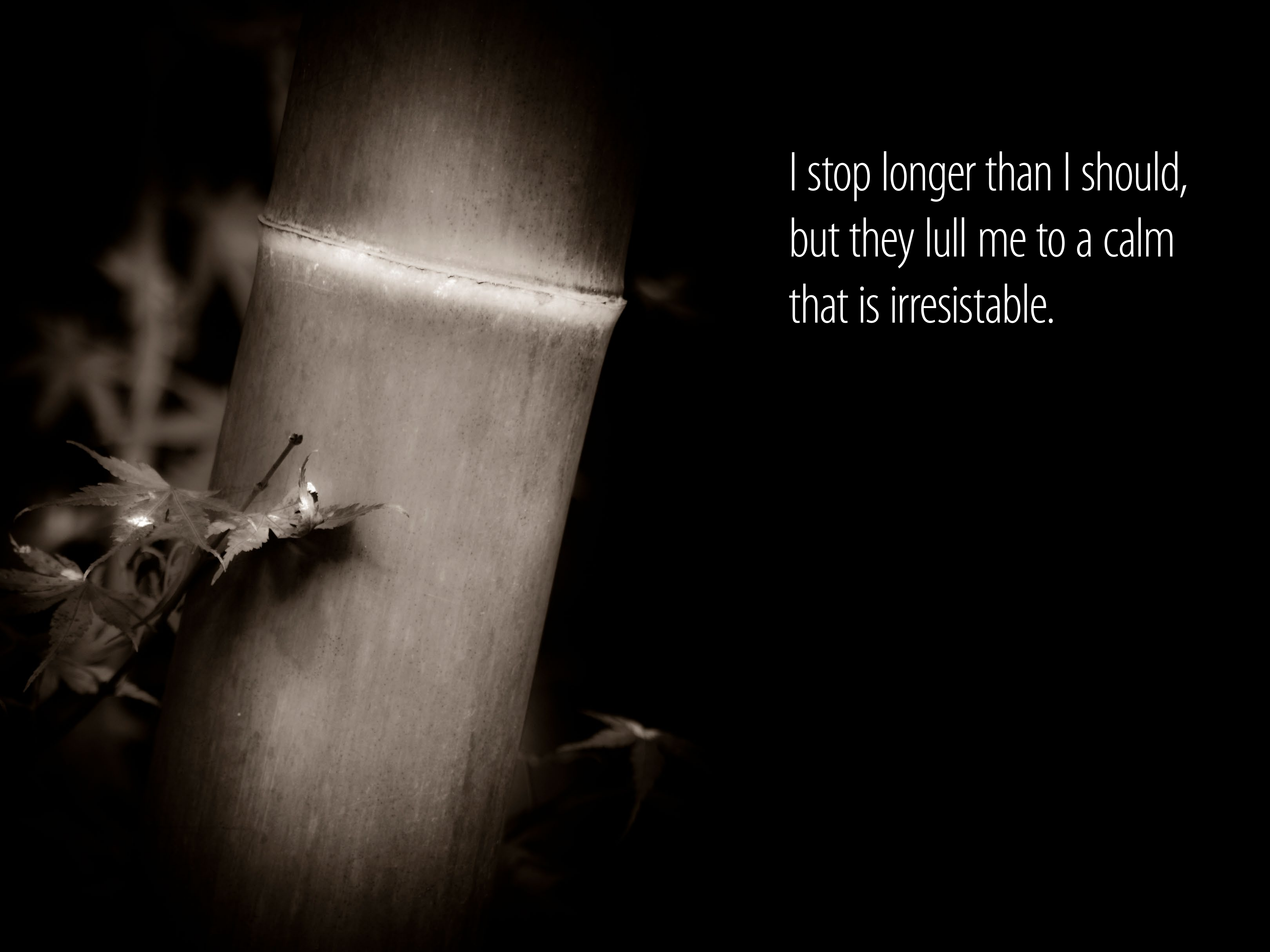
永和  
年  
春

The cool breeze  
Through my neighbor's bamboo  
Just a remnant.

~ Issa







I stop longer than I should,  
but they lull me to a calm  
that is irresistible.









Unexpectedly, on the other side of the fence, the garden opens. It invites us to wander, to let go of time, to dream.







The stone lantern (*dai-dōrō*)  
calls me forward. "Come this  
way! Here is the path."

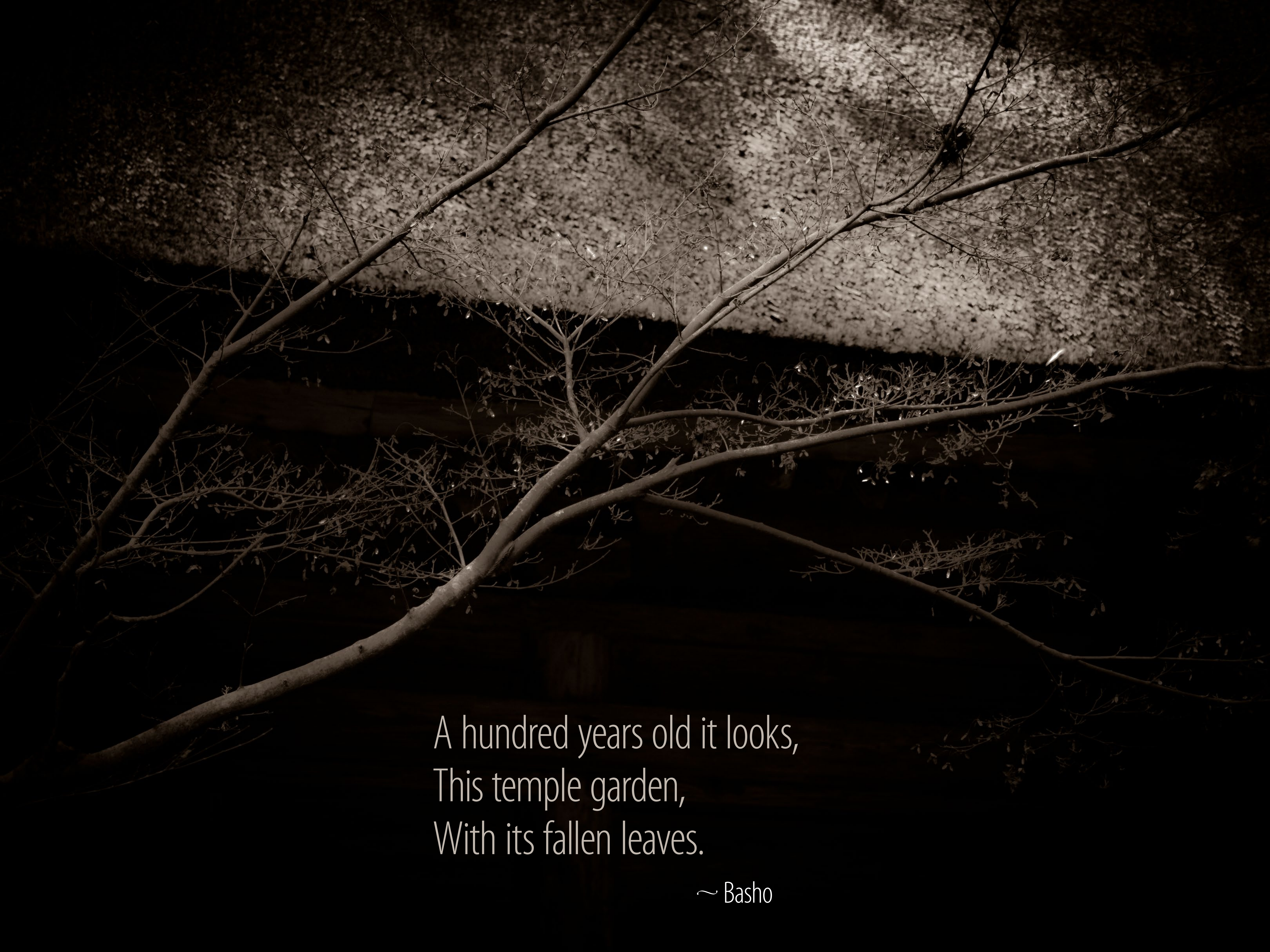
I know they are only  
inanimate stone, but why,  
then, can I *hear* them invite  
me to wander further?











A hundred years old it looks,  
This temple garden,  
With its fallen leaves.

~ Basho



I heard the unblown flute  
In the deep tree-shades  
Of the temple wall.

~ Basho







Falling into the fields  
Falling from the fields  
The leaves of autumn.

~ Buson

At Zuiganji Temple, I rested for a few minutes on a bench under a maple tree. Gently, a breeze caught the orange and golden leaves, showering me like autumn snowfall. For an hour, I watched their descent, content to just be there, in Japan, under the maple.







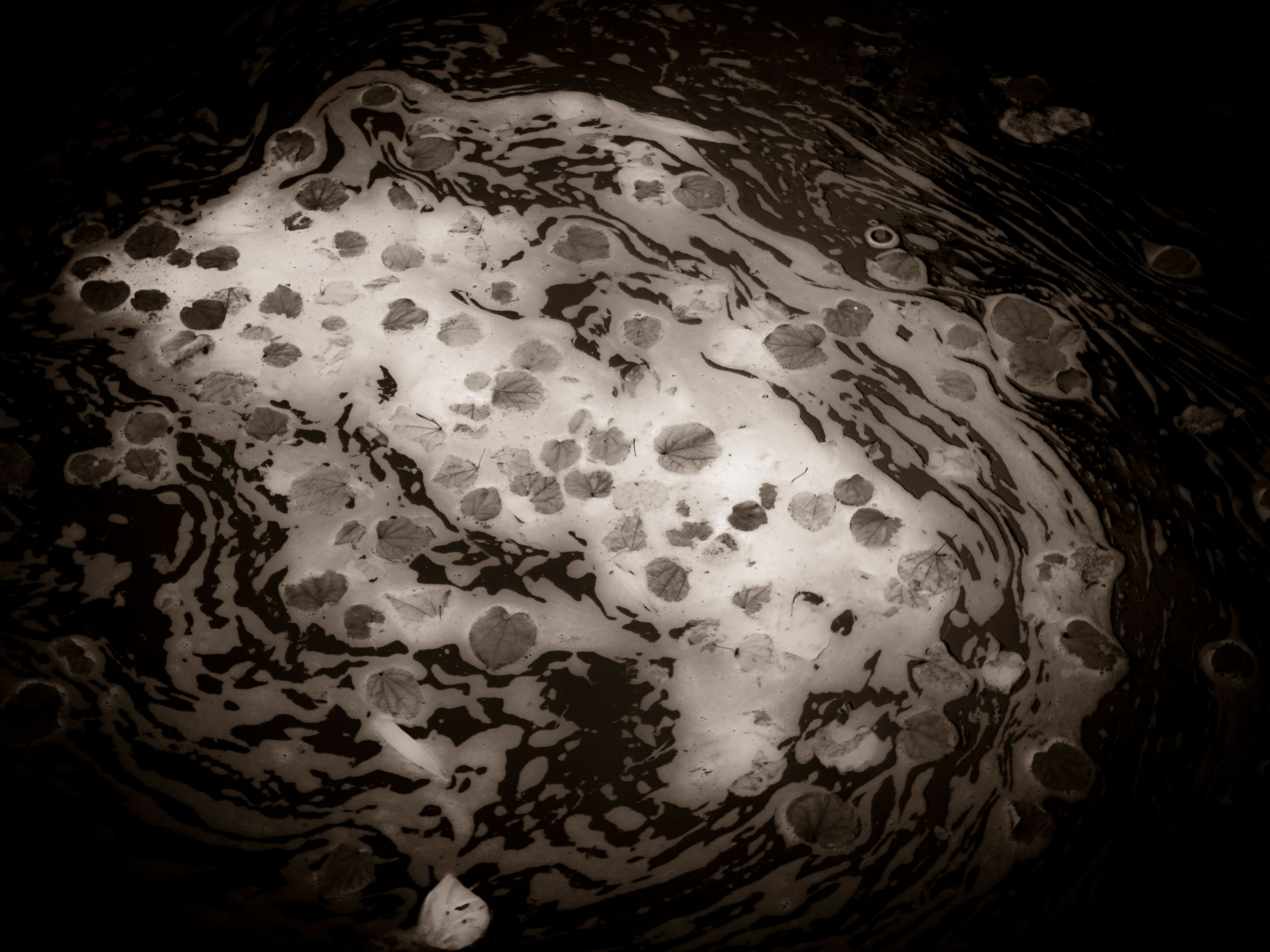






Whether a large river or a small garden stream, think how it flows all day, all night, every day, every night!

I know it is not waiting for me to arrive and observe the performance, but I can't help thinking that it knows I'm here. I linger, not wanting to end the moment — not wanting to stop the flow.











After a while, the path leads to the temple center. Though it's my first time visiting this temple, I feel like I've walked these stones before — that my feet have helped smooth their surface over *centuries*.











To the gardener in the tree above me, I called "*Ohayo gozaimasu.*" How could I have known he was the head priest of the temple I had been photographing? Or that he had been interested in photography in his youth and had been watching me intently? He came down and motioned an invitation to tea. With dictionaries in hand, we stumbled through a conversation about cameras and darkrooms. He showed me a shoebox with his ancient camera and a few faded prints. I never learned his name, but I dream of him often.



















The temple buildings look as though they have *grown* there, instead of having been built.

















The Japanese have an art known as *bonseki* – growing rocks. Who among us has not picked up a stone or a pebble and taken it home? After all, we live on a rock.







Everywhere in Japan are stone *sekihi*, large rocks with calligraphic inscriptions. They are not meant to be read; they are there to connect us to the past – and to remind us that our lives are but pebbles in a long line of history. . .











小太郎  
比翼塚

献燈

献燈



文化元年甲子年

孔放普理真善重子

四月六

頌覺妙證信

月八日

德元

院名觀光園大始

年



東夷

清藏

真岩道如禪



當堂中興  
 正泰四年  
 權大僧都澄泉

權大僧都澄泉  
 文政五年  
 十二月十六日



常照院名觀光圓大施  
 十一月十日

... a connection to our  
ancestors, even those not  
from our own family.













And I know I've been here before  
wandered here before  
lived here before  
prayed here before  
dreamed here before . . .





多神社





... and will return.



Notes

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## *Dreams of Japan*

Where to begin? I have so many stories of Japan and my travels there.

My father was dying of cancer. My brother and I had cared for him for months, 'round the clock, 24/7. The disease had metastasized to his brain and he was unresponsive. I knew the host who had invited me to speak in Japan had been planning the events for over a year – but my father lay dying. It was my brother who convinced me, to keep my commitment, to accept that there was nothing we could do for Dad anymore. On Tuesday, we moved him into the hospice care facility. Wednesday morning, he died. On Thursday, I flew to Japan.

My host, Mr. Koshimura, met me at Narita Airport near Tokyo. As we exchanged customary greetings, he inquired, "How are you doing after your long flight?" I had not yet processed my father's passing, so the words just fell from my mouth: "My father died yesterday." In disbelief, he asked me to clarify what I had said by repeating it. The tears came. To both of us. At each

of the presentations on the 11-city tour, Koshimura-san told my story.

On a later trip, my friend David Grant Best and I were wandering through the northern region of Tohoku on our own. Neither of us speaks Japanese. Because we knew nothing of how to travel in rural Japan, I had contacted the Japan National Tourist Organization to ask them. "How do I get from Tokyo to Tohoku?" The nice woman on the phone was nonplussed, "Where in Tohoku?" I thought for a minute and said, "Anywhere." She couldn't help me. We went round and round. Finally, I just picked a rural town at random. "I want to go to... Ofunato." "Oh, of course! I can definitely assist you in travel to Ofunato."

Months later, David and I were preparing for our last day of photography on the Tohoku coast. The photography had been wonderful all week, but neither of us had yet been to Ofunato. I asked him where he would photograph on this last day. Suddenly, David slipped flawlessly into his perfect John Wayne accent and slowly drawled, "Well ... *one* of us has gotta go to Ofunatta." We laughed

about his John Wayne quip for days – but neither of us ever did get there.

On three occasions I've photographed in the small fishing-port village of Onagawa, just northeast of the famous Matsushima tourist center. Then, on March 11, 2011, a magnitude-9 earthquake shook northeastern Japan just off Onagawa's coast, unleashing a savage tsunami directly at Onagawa. There is a news photograph of a car that was carried by the waves to the top of a three-story building and deposited there. I have not been back to Onagawa. I'm not sure I can, but the portraits I have from my three trips there keep calling to me. Much of Onagawa – and so many other coastal communities – were simply wiped off the face of the earth. *Namu Amida Butsu.*

**Tech notes:** Unlike most issues of *Kokoro*, this one consists of only one project – photographed between 1990 and 2018 – using four different cameras. What I'd really like to discuss is the food I ate in Japan that is the best cuisine I've ever experienced. Perhaps I've said enough. Wait – there is also the *ofuro* – the nightly soak in a Japanese hot tub. And the amazing train system. And the incredibly friendly people. And persimmons – ah, the ripe persimmons. Don't take my word for it. Just go and see for yourself. Japan is a magical place. I can hardly wait to return. I dream of it often.



Folios, Chapbooks, Prints

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\$1000 Patron of the Arts - You'll receive a special thank you of, well, you'll see!

[You can donate to support Brooks' creative life using this link.](#) Thanks!



**Brooks Jensen** is a fine-art photographer, publisher, workshop teacher, and writer. In his personal work he specializes in small prints, handmade artist books, and digital media publications.

He and his wife (Maureen Gallagher) are the owners, co-founders, editors, and publishers of the award winning *LensWork*, one of today's most respected and important periodicals in fine art photography. With subscribers in 73 countries, Brooks' impact on fine art photography is truly worldwide. His long-running podcasts on art and photography are heard over the Internet by thousands every day. All 1,000+ podcasts are available at [LensWork Online](http://LensWorkOnline.com), the LensWork membership website. LensWork Publishing is also at the leading edge in multimedia and digital media publishing with *LensWork Extended* — a PDF-based, media-rich expanded version of the magazine.

Brooks is the author of twelve best-selling books about photography and creativity: *Photography, Art, & Media* (2016); *The Creative Life in Photography* (2013); *Letting Go of the Camera* (2004); *Single Exposures* (4 books in a series, random observations on art, photography and creativity); *Looking at Images* (2014); *Seeing in SIXES* (2016); *Seeing in SIXES* (2017); *The Best of the LensWork Interviews* (2016); as well as a photography monograph, *Made of Steel* (2012). His next books will be *Those Who Inspire Me (And Why)* and *Looking at Images 2018*. [Kokoro](http://Kokoro.com) is a free, monthly PDF e-magazine of his personal work and is available (both current and back issues) for download from his [website](http://brooks.com).

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