

THE PRIEST OF TOZEN-IN



A Brooks Jensen

A Brooks Jensen Arts Publication

As the train approached the next town in our tour of rural Japan, it snaked its way along the valley floor at the edge of a steep hillside. On our left we started to see the signs of the approaching town. The dusk of the evening was growing dark. Just before we arrived at the station, I spied the back side of a quaint temple barely visible in the deepening shadows. That would be my first photographic adventure the next morning.

At first light the next day, I worked my way back down the train track and entered the temple from behind, slowly photographing as I went. I'd been working an hour or so when I suddenly became aware of a gardener, high in a tree, trimming and pruning. We smiled and waved. He returned my "Hello" with *ohayo gozaimasu* and we both kept working.











Another hour of photography brought a woman from inside the temple with a note, written with four words in English, but clearly without the benefit of a native speaker's knowledge. It read, "Work hard. Want tea." I took the latter to be a question and nodded that I would. She guided me to the veranda of the main temple building where I found the temple priest — my gardener friend! — now dressed in his robes, waiting to share some tea and Japanese sweets.



With the fumbling help of our translation dictionaries, we managed a sort of conversation mostly in disjointed words and phrases. I told him I was studying the Japanese philosopher Dogen. *"Muzukashii, desu ne,"* he said. "Yes," I replied, "very difficult."

I had with me an introduction book to my photographic project, complete with a Japanese translation. He read it intently, then excused himself for a moment.

He returned with a small box of old photographs and an ancient Japanese camera of a kind I'd never seen. He explained that he had been very interested in photography in his teenage years before dedicating his life to the priesthood at age 18. He showed me the pictures he had developed and printed in his darkroom, presumably some 60+ years earlier. He pronounced it clearly — "darkroom" — the only word of English he spoke in our entire encounter.

An hour or so later, I left with his portrait and a memory of the morning when our two lives crossed paths, mine and the temple priest of Tozen-in.







Brooks Jensen is a fine-art photographer, publisher, workshop teacher, and writer. In his personal work he specializes in small prints, hand-made artist's 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 world-wide. His long-running podcasts on art and photography are heard over the Internet by thousands every day. All 900+ 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 seven best-selling books about photography and creativity: *Letting Go of the Camera* (2004); *The Creative Life in Photography* (2013); *Single Exposures* (4 books in a series, random observations on art, photography and creativity); and *Looking at Images* (2014); as well as a photography monograph, *Made of Steel* (2012). His next book will be *Those Who Inspire Me (And Why)*. A free monthly compilation of of this image journal, [Kokoro](http://kokoro.com), is available for download.

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