

Shinrin-yoku

The Japanese Way of Forest Bathing
for Health and Relaxation

Yoshifumi Miyazaki


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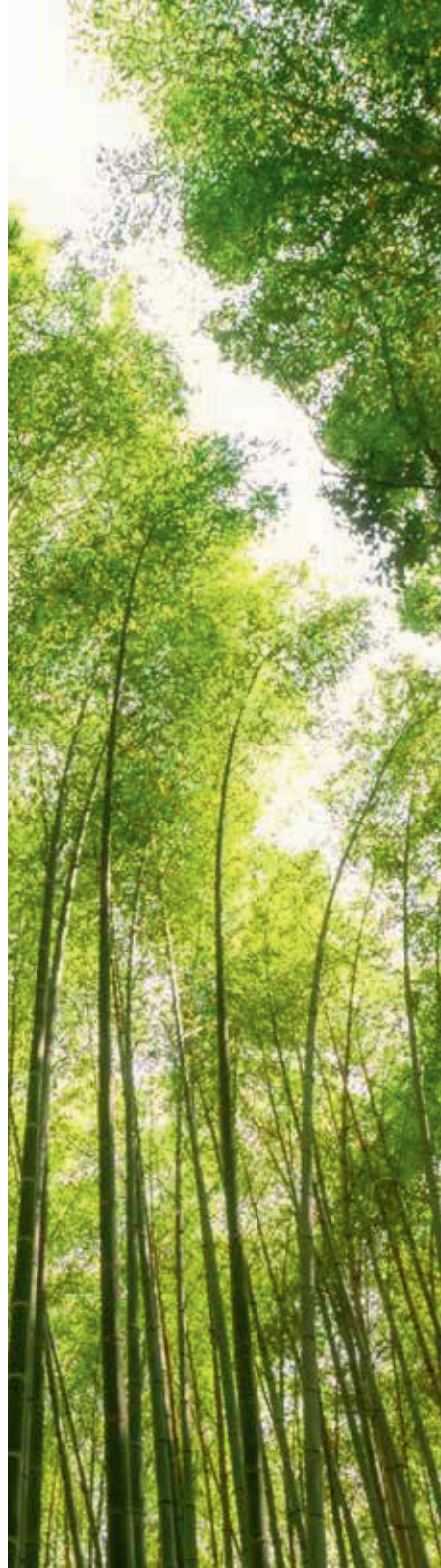
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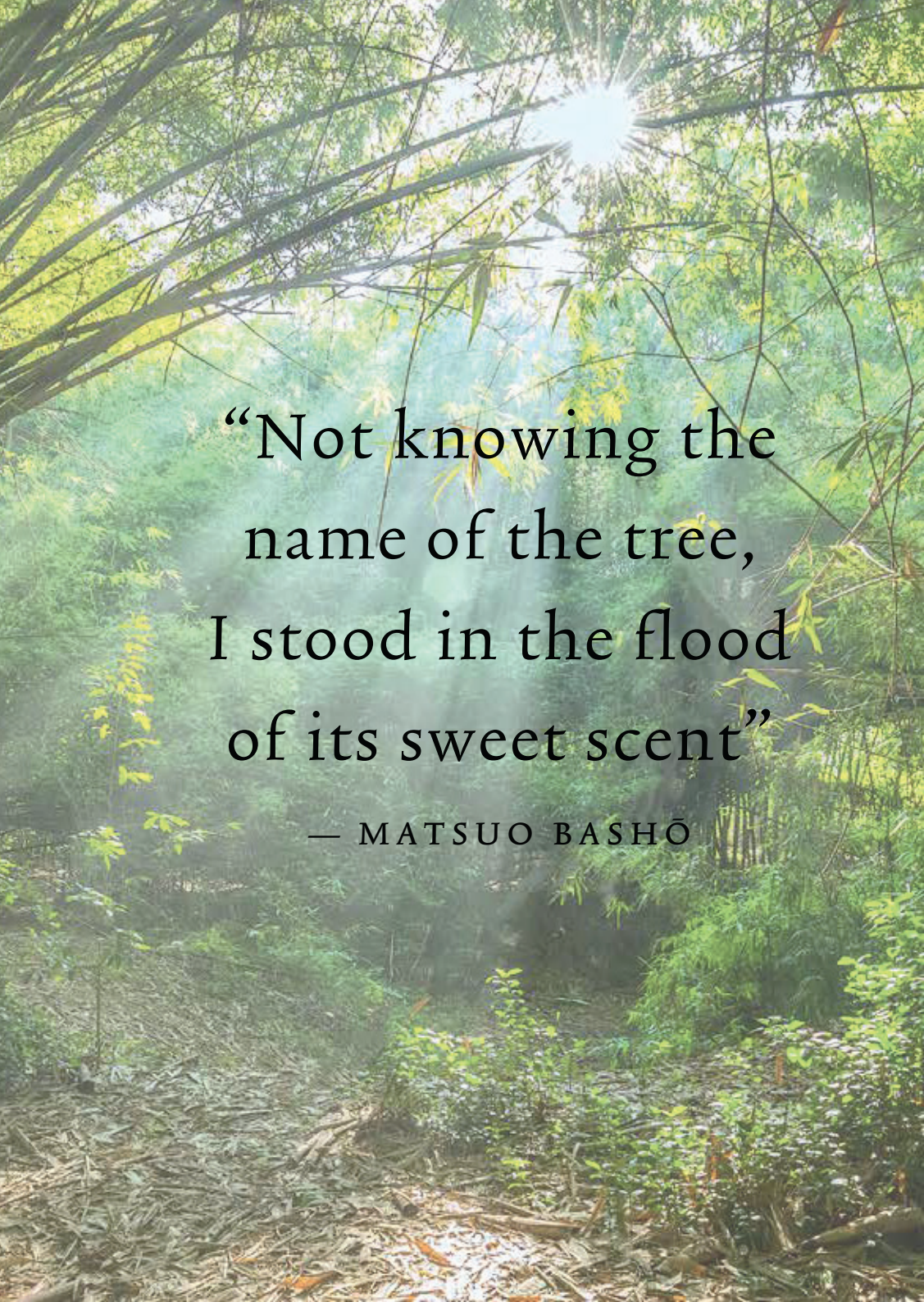
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A photograph of a forest path. Sunlight filters through the dense canopy of green trees and bamboo, creating a bright, hazy atmosphere. The path is covered in fallen leaves and branches. The text is overlaid in the center.

“Not knowing the
name of the tree,
I stood in the flood
of its sweet scent”

— MATSUO BASHŌ



Imagine taking a walk in the forest right now. You feel the earth and leaves under your feet, the snap of twigs. You listen to the birdsong and look up through the breaks in the canopy to the sky above, noticing how the light filters through to a point just further along the path.

You breathe in, deeply.

You smell the distinct forest aromas:
moss, sap, earth and wood.

You take it all in.

Introduction

In Japan there is a notable preventative medicine that is being practised by increasing numbers of the population. Although it was borne out of intuition, this medicine is now being supported by a growing body of scientific research which endorses its many benefits.

The word *shinrin-yoku* was coined in 1982 by Tomohide Akiyama¹, Director of the Japanese Forestry Agency. It can be translated literally as “forest bathing” and is used in a similar way to “sun bathing” and “sea bathing”. You don’t literally take a bath, but you do bathe in the environment of the forest, using all your senses to experience nature up close.





WHAT IS *SHINRIN-YOKU*?

Simply put, *shinrin-yoku* is the practice of walking slowly through the woods, in no hurry, for a morning, an afternoon or a day. When the phrase was first coined, the idea was more of a marketing exercise to attract people to the many beautiful forests of Japan, but since then myself and a number of other scientists in Japan and other countries around the world have begun to study the physiological and psychological effects of nature, and specifically forests, on human health and wellbeing. It is the understanding that somehow we feel better when we are surrounded by nature that has inspired this research.

森
林
浴

The Japanese characters for *shinrin-yoku*. The first character is a forest (three trees), the second a wood (two trees), and the third "bathe" (flowing water on the left, and a valley on the right).