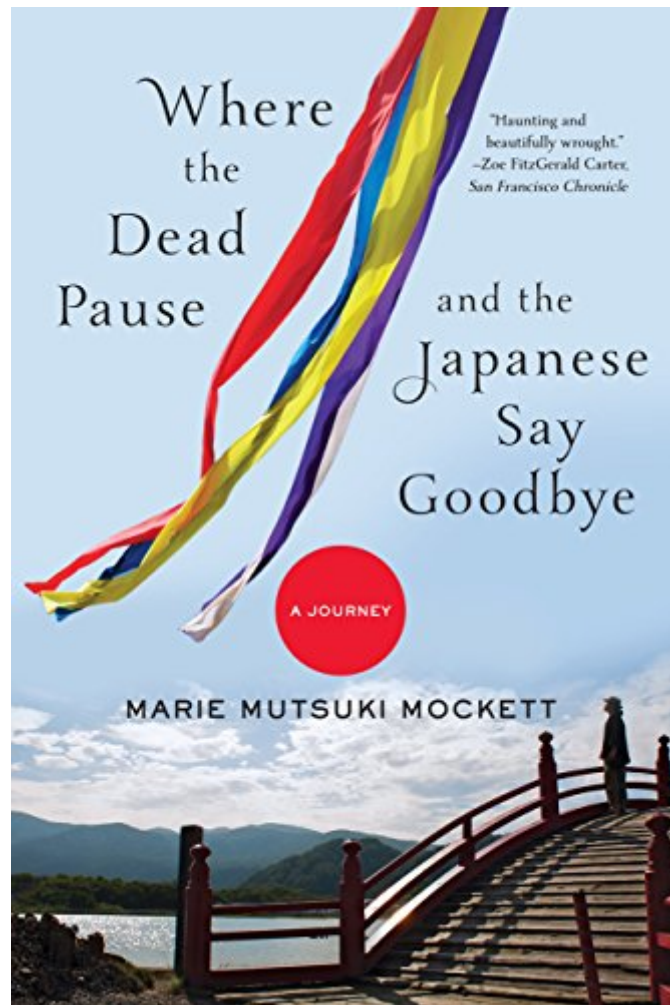


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Where The Dead Pause, And The Japanese Say Goodbye: A Journey



Synopsis

Read it. You will be uplifted. "Ruth Ozeki, Zen priest, author of *A Tale for the Time Being* Marie Mutsuki Mockett's family owns a Buddhist temple 25 miles from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. In March 2011, after the earthquake and tsunami, radiation levels prohibited the burial of her Japanese grandfather's bones. As Japan mourned thousands of people lost in the disaster, Mockett also grieved for her American father, who had died unexpectedly. Seeking consolation, Mockett is guided by a colorful cast of Zen priests and ordinary Japanese who perform rituals that disturb, haunt, and finally uplift her. Her journey leads her into the radiation zone in an intricate white hazmat suit; to Eihei-ji, a school for Zen Buddhist monks; on a visit to a Crab Lady and Fuzzy-Headed Priest's temple on Mount Doom; and into the "thick dark" of the subterranean labyrinth under Kiyomizu temple, among other twists and turns. From the ecstasy of a cherry blossom festival in the radiation zone to the ghosts inhabiting chopsticks, Mockett writes of both the earthly and the sublime with extraordinary sensitivity. Her unpretentious and engaging voice makes her the kind of companion a reader wants to stay with wherever she goes, even into the heart of grief itself.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A beautiful and haunting memoir of a Japanese-American woman coming to terms with deep personal tragedy in the wake of the 2011 Japanese tsunami disaster. Within a brief span of time, Marie Mutsuki Mockett suffers the unexpected losses of her American father and her maternal Japanese grandparents then is struck by the news of the Fukushima tsunami disaster devastating the home region of her Japanese family. Mockett traveled frequently to this area from early childhood and throughout her life coming to know and love it, so she fears not only for her family's safety but for an entire way of life. She worries that it will be impossible for her to pass along to her young son the rich cultural heritage that her mother had passed down to her. It is with all of this weighing on her mind and spirit that Mockett courageously decides to head to Japan to confront her grief directly in the hopes of finding true wisdom from Buddhism, Shintoism, ancient Japanese rituals, or simply the collective grieving of the Japanese themselves. What follows is a moving journey of pilgrimages to Buddhist temples of various sects and a myriad of spiritual locations while encountering an extraordinary cast of characters along the way from eccentric monks to blind female mediums (otaku) who connect the grieving to the dead. It is clear throughout that we are being guided on our journey by a brilliant writer. Mockett's writing style is nuanced and lyrical while always remaining unpretentious, never overcomplicated with any unnecessary clutter. There is a Zen-like elegant beauty in the simplicity at work here befitting the Japanese culture and landscapes through which Mockett leads us.

Not knowing much about the book other than it was about grief and Zen Buddhism, and nothing at all about the author, I went to a reading of it. Mockett read an excerpt, and I found that my fears of New Age-ism and "Eat, Pray, Love" fetishization and egotism were totally unfounded. This is much more than just a memoir; it's a history book, a book on Japanese culture, and on religion as well. Mockett does an incredible job of providing the necessary context for her experiences, (historical, cultural, and personal), seamlessly weaving in her own valuable insights that never judge or recoil from her encounters; it's a work that humanizes rather than objectifies Japanese culture, which I found refreshing. You could say she has no other choice; many of the people she writes about aren't strangers, they're her relatives, family friends, and co-workers. Surprisingly (to me), a great deal of the book focuses on Buddhism in all its variations in Japan. I was struck by the many perceptive thoughts the author had on meditation and specifically, Zen, (not least of which because I, too, have had eerily similar thoughts and experiences, both in personal practice and academic study of Buddhism, and had thought I was completely alone in them). These were deep insights,

worded concisely, simply, on the transformative effects of practicing meditation and ritual that serious practitioners will recognize as a product of great sincerity and thoughtfulness. There's also a total absence of the trendiness of injecting "mindful" rhetoric into her writing, for which I was very grateful. There's far too much writing on Buddhist meditation in the West that loves to abstract to the extreme the usefulness of such a practice.

I received this book for free through Goodreads First Reads. After her Grandfather's death, the author, who is a Japanese and whose family owns a Buddhist Temple just 25 miles from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, decides to go back to visit after the earthquake and tsunami that took many lives on March 11, 2011. The plant which was damaged in the tsunami as well, started to leak radiation causing the area to become an unsafe place for people to return. Not having been able to bury her Grandfather's bones at the time of his death, she had to wait for a time where they could once again dig in the soil. The author was also still mourning the death of her father who had died three years earlier, so she decides to study how the Japanese deal with grief, which she hopes will help her with hers as well. From visiting different Obon Ceremonies (The Festival of Souls is a Buddhist celebration. The Japanese believe that during this period the souls of their ancestors return to their homes on earth. This is the time when people can guide and help their ancestors' spirits to find peace.) to experiencing many different Buddhist ceremonies, and rituals. From the many Temples and their priest that she talks to, and how each of them is helping their community deal with their grief. This book delves into the history of Japan and Buddhism, its traditions, religion, folklore and the respect the people have for these traditions. I love Buddhas and have them all through my house, but I now see that I do not really know that much about Buddhism, from Zen, Pure Land to Shingon, it was a fascinating look into its history and what it stands for.

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