

Sandokai – Taking Part in the Gathering

Shirou Xiqian (700-790 CE)

The mind of the great Indian Immortal
moves seamlessly between East and West.
It's human nature to be quick or slow,
but in the Way there are no northern or southern ancestors.

The mysterious source of the bright is clear and unstained;
branches of light stream from that dark.
Trying to control things is only delusion,
but hanging onto the absolute isn't enlightenment, either.
We and everything we perceive
are interwoven and not interwoven,
and this interweaving continues on and on,
while each thing stands in its own place.
In the world of form, we differentiate substances and images;
in the world of sound, we distinguish music from noise.
In the embrace of the dark, good words and bad words are the same,
but in the bright we divide clear speech from confusion.

The four elements return to their natures
like a child to the mother,
Fire is hot, the winds blow,
water is wet, the earth solid,
The eye sees form, the ear hears voices,
the nose smells fragrance, the tongue tastes salt and sour.
Everything, depending on its root, spreads out its leaves.
Both roots and branches must return to their origin,
and so do respectful and insulting words.

The darkness is inside the bright,
but don't look only with the eyes of the dark.
The brightness is inside the dark,
but don't look only through the eyes of the bright.
Bright and dark are a pair,
like front foot and back foot walking.

Each thing by nature has worth,
but we notice it is shaped by its circumstances.
Things fit together like boxes and lids,
while the absolute is like arrows meeting in mid-air.
When you let these words in, you encounter the ancestors;
Don't limit yourself to your own small story.
If you don't see the Way with your own eyes,
you won't know the road even as you're walking on it.
Walking the Way, we're never near or far from it:
deluded, we are cut off from it by mountains and rivers.

You who seek the mystery,
in daylight or in the shadows of night, don't throw away your time.