

# what the sutra says

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The Sandokai is the work of Master Sekito Kisen (in Chinese: Shítóu Xīqiān) who was born in in southern China in 700 AD and died in 790 AD. This was an era in which Zen grew in popularity and began to emerge as a distinct school with many strong, dynamic personalities like Bodhidharma and Eno. However there were also disputes especially between the Northern school of Zen which emphasised a step by step, contemplative practice, and the Southern school which taught sudden awakening.

Few facts are known about Sekito's life. It is said that at the age of sixteen he was ordained as a monk by the sixth patriarch, Eno. Eno had numerous disciples of which the most important were Seigen and Nangaku. From these two evolved the two schools, Soto and Rinzai. Sekito eventually studied with Seigen and it was from him that he received dharma transmission.

The name Sekito means “stone head” and derives from his doing zazen on a rocky ledge where he practised continuously day and night with great determination.

What does Sandokai mean?

**San:** the idea of difference, duality, phenomena, existences – shiki (thesis). eg. Mountains and rivers, parents and children, satori and illusions, life and death, existence and non-existence.

**Do:** the idea of identity, origin, the void, essence – ku (antithesis).

**Kai:** mixture, fusion, interpenetration, harmony in a broad deep sense – (synthesis)

San and Do are both necessary for equilibrium, harmony. Intimately blended they realise the Middle Way. San enters Do, Do enters San: that is Kai. So, Sandokai means the harmony of phenomena and essence.

Why did Sekito write it? It alludes to the split between the Northern and Southern schools as well as other dichotomies eg. one and many, light and dark, sameness and difference. It was also customary for a zen master as he neared the end of his life to sum up his life's teaching in a testamentary poem.

The Sandokai is very important in the Soto Zen tradition. It is chanted every day in Soto Zen temples throughout the world.

## Sandōkai

Chikudo **daisen** no **shin**, **tōzai** mitsu ni aifu su. **Ninkon** ni **ridon** ari, **dō** ni **nam**boku no so nashi. **Reigen myō** ni **kō ket**-tari, shiha **an** ni **ruchū** su. Ji o **shū** suru mo moto kore mayoi, ri ni **kanō** mo mata satori ni arazu. **Mon mon is-sai** no **kyō**, ego to fu ego to. Eshite sarani **ai** wataru, shikarazareba **kurai** ni **yot**-te **jū** su. Shiki moto shitsu **zō** o kotoni shi, **shō** moto **rak**-ku o



Sekito Kisen

koto ni su. **An** wa **jōchū** no koto ni **kanai**, **mei** wa **seidaku** no ku o wakatsu. **Shidai** no **shō** onozukara fukusu, kono sono haha o uru ga gotoshi. Hi wa **nes**-shi, kaze wa **dōyō**, mizu wa uru **oi**, chi wa **kengo**. Manako wa iro, mimi wa **onjō**, hana wa ka, shita wa **kanso**. Shikamo ichi ichi no **hō** ni **oite**, ne ni **yot**-te **habunpu** su. **Honmatsu** subekaraku **shū** ni kisubeshi, **sompi** sono go o mochiyu. **Meichū** ni **atat**-te **an** ari, **ansō** o **mot**-te **ō** koto nakare. **Anchū** ni **atat**-te **mei** ari, **meisō** o **mot**-te miru koto nakare. **Meian** ono ono **aitai** shite, hisuru ni **zengo** no ayumi no gotoshi. **Ban**motsu onozukara **kō** ari, masani **yō** to sho to o **iu** beshi. **Jison** sureba **kangai gas**-shi, **riōzureba sempo sasō**. Koto o ukete wa subekaraku **shū** o e subeshi, mizukara kiku o **ris**-suru koto nakare. Sokumoku **dō** o e **sezumba**, ashi o hakobu mo izu**kunzo** michi o **shiran**. Ayumi o susumureba **gonnon** ni arazu, may**ōte senga** no ko o hedas-. Tsutsu**shinde san gen** no hito ni **mōsu**, **kōin** munashiku wataru koto nakare.

## The Harmony of Difference and Equality

The mind of the great sage of India is intimately transmitted from west to east. While human faculties are sharp or dull, the way has no northern or southern ancestors.

The spiritual source shines clear in the light; the branching streams flow on in the dark.

Grasping at things is surely delusion; according with sameness is still not enlightenment.

All the objects of the senses interact and yet do not.

Interacting brings involvement. Otherwise, each keeps its place.

Sights vary in quality and form, sounds differ as pleasing or harsh.

Refined and common speech come together in the dark,

clear and murky phrases are distinguished in the light.

The four elements return to their natures just as a child turns to its mother;

Fire heats, wind moves, water wets, earth is solid.

Eye and sights, ear and sounds, nose and smells, tongue and tastes;

Thus with each and every thing, depending on these roots, the leaves spread forth.

Trunk and branches share the essence; revered and common, each has its speech.

In the light there is darkness, but don't take it as dark;

In the dark there is light, but don't see it as light.

Light and dark oppose one another like the front and back foot in walking.

Each of the myriad things has its merit, expressed according to function and place.

Phenomena exist; box and lid fit. principle responds; arrow points meet.

Hearing the words, understand the meaning; don't set up standards of your own.

If you don't understand the way right before you, how will you know the path as you walk?

Progress is not a matter of far or near, but if you are confused, mountains and rivers block your way.

I respectfully urge you who study the mystery, do not pass your days and nights in vain.

