

Classic Poetry Series

Saigyō
- poems -

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Saigyō(1118 - 1190)

23 year old Norikiyo Satoh, an elite warrior who served the retired emperor, became a Buddhist monk and called himself Saigyō. His reasons for becoming a monk are not known.

However, it is said that the actual person was quite different from the rustic image one might have of a wandering Buddhist monk and hermit. He had connections with the highest authorities of his time, such as the retired emperor Suitoku, worked with Taira no Kiyomori as a warrior, met with the first Shogun, Minamoto no Yoritomo, and left us with many episodes from his time as a political coordinator, at which he worked even after becoming a monk.

He was, of course, also a famous poet. Since his death, his life has become legend in Japan. But where can we find the true Saigyō? Perhaps in the "suffering spiritual flower" of his poems.

As Banked Clouds

As banked clouds
are swept apart by the wind,
at dawn the sudden cry
of the first wild geese
winging across the mountains.

Saigyō

Having Drifted Apart

Having drifted apart,
Why should folk
Despise each other? For
Not known and unknowing
Times there were once before...

Saigyō

Having Seen Them Long

Having seen them long,
I hold the flowers so dear
That when they scatter
I find it all the more sad
To bid them my last farewell.

Saigyō

He Made No Promise

He made no promise, yet
Wondering if he'll come, I wait,
In the early evening;
If only it would stay this way,
Remaining light...

Saigyo

How Wonderful

How wonderful, that
Her heart
Should show me kindness;
And of all the numberless folk,
Grief should not touch me.

Saigyō

In A Mountain Village

In a mountain village
at autumn's end—
that's where you learn
what sadness means
in the blast of the wintry wind.

Saigyō

Limitations Gone

limitations gone
since my mind fixed on the moon
clarity and serenity
make something for which
there's no end in sight

Saigyō

Not Stopping To Mark The Trail

Not stopping to mark the trail,
let me push even deeper
into the mountain!
Perhaps there's a place
where bad news can never reach me!

Saigyo

Now I Understand!

Now I understand!
When to remember me
She vowed,
She said she would forget me,
But kindly!

Saigyo

O, How Sad

O, how sad!
Why of visitors
Should there be not one?
In melancholy, where I dwell
The wind comes upon the bush-clover leaves.

Saigyō

Sunk In Melancholy

Sunk in melancholy, and
Gazing
Upon the moon: its hue:
Why is it so deeply
Stained with sadness, I wonder

Saigyō

The Monk Saigyō

Should I blame the moon
For bringing forth this sadness,
As if it pictured grief?
Lifting up my troubled face,
I regard it through my tears

Saigyō

The Monk Saigyō

Should I blame the moon
For bringing forth this sadness,
As if it pictured grief?
Lifting up my troubled face,
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Saigyō

There's Not A Trace Of Cloud

There's not a trace of cloud
Now-and she
Is in my thoughts;
The moon and my heart
Seem to waver.

Saigyō

Thought I Was Free

Thought I was free
of passion, so this melancholy
comes as surprise:
a woodcock shoots up from the marsh
where autumn's twilight falls.

Saigyō

Unbroken Gloom.

times when unbroken
gloom is over all our world
over which still
sits the ever brilliant moon
sight of it casts me down more

Saigyō

Well Do I Know Myself

Well do I know myself, so
Your coldness
I did not think to blame, yet
My bitterness has
Soaked my sleeves, it seems

Saigyō

Why Should I Be Bitter

Why should I be bitter
About someone who was
A complete stranger
Until a certain moment
In a day that has passed.

Saigyo

Winds Of Autumn

Even in a person
most times indifferent
to things around him
they waken feelings
the first winds of autumn

Saigyō