**The Robe and the Dharma are One**

**By Kōdō Sawaki**

Since ancient times, in our country, faith in the kesa has been very strong.Examining the history of successive emperors, there were emperors who attended formal functions wearing the kesa. There were also emperors who slept peacefully under the kesa of a high priest. Even today, some of those kesas worn by ancient emperors are preserved in Shōsō-in, the imperial treasure house.

Even the statues of Hachiman, the syncretic divinity of war, were often made in the shape of bodhisattvas and priests. One of the well-known examples is the Hachiman in Usa Shrine, and it was believed that the Hachiman would show up wearing a nine-panel kesa when offering teachings.

The Hachiman Mahasattva statue presented by Prince Atsumi was in the form of a priest wearing a 9-panel kesa.

Prince Shōtoku wore the okesa when performing government functions and later even warriors wore kesas when going into battle. It is said that this was inspired by the description in “Hike-kyo (Karunā-Pundarika Sutra): “Even in the midst of a battle, if someone holds up a kesa, the respect and reverence the enemy feels towards it would defuse the conflict.”

Furthermore, many people were given names incorporating the kanji character for Kesa, emphasizing

The faith in the kesa.

Now then, what is the relationship between the kesa and our own school’s theological principle?

That is: the Kesa and the Buddha Dharma are One Thusness.

In the Record of the Transmission of Illumination, it says.:

The Forty-second Ancestor, Reverend Liangshan, sought instruction from the latter Tongan.

Tongan asked, “What about the ‘matter for those in patched robes’?”

Liangshan had no response.

Tongan said, “In studying buddha to have ‘not yet reached this standpoint’ is the greatest suffering. You ask, and I will speak.”

Lingshan asked, “What about the ‘matter for those in patched robes’?”

Tongan said, “Mitus - Intimate.”

Lingshan thereupon greatly awakened.”

In other words, in answering the question, “What does it mean be the one who wears the okesa?”  
Tongan’s answer was “Mitsu - Intimate”. The one who wears a kesa is a one body of kōan. This one being wearing the okesa is something we spend our entire life sincerely studying and examining.

Wherever the rank and the position one finds himself to sit, the one wearing kesa sits at ease. The faith in the okesa encompasses our entire being.

All the buddhas and ancestors lived with this faith and revered, protected and maintained the Dharma Robes.

At the beginning of “The Hymn of Praise of Buddhist Formal Clothes”, there is a verse that says:

“The merit of the kesa is immense. All Buddhas of three times use the kesa as the armor to protect themselves from delusion. All sages in the ten directions use it as the raft to cross the ocean of life and death.”

In “The Record of Tōzan Ryōkai’s Teaching”, there is the following dialog:

“Tōzan asked a monk, ‘Of all the kinds of suffering, which is the most painful?’”

The monk answered, “The Hell is most painful”.

Anytime, anyplace there is always a silly one.

So, Tozan said, “The most painful is to remain unclear about the most important matter while in the Robe.”

If you are asking where the heaven is while wearing the kesa, you will never reach that place where you should be in your lifetime.

Wearing the kesa is itself the completion of the most important matter and the arrival at the ultimate place. Not being able to feel the fulfilment while wearing the kesa is the worst suffering

In “the Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish”, Buddha says, “Even after my death, those who are wearing the Three Robes, whether or not they have received or not received the precepts, all will enter Nirvana”. In other words, the kesa is the robe of liberation, the robe of formless virtuous field.

In the fascicle entitled “Shōbōgenzō Kesa-kudoku - Virtue of the kesa”, Dōgen Zenji wrote:

“Truly, although we regret that we have been born in the remote land in the [degenerated] age

of the Last Dharma, we can rejoice that we have encountered the Dharma and the robe that

has been legitimately transmitted from a buddha to a buddha.”

The kesa is exactly the Buddha Dharma.

“It is said that Shakyamuni who was 6 feet tall, transmitted robe to Maitreya who was 1000 feet tall, but the kesa was neither not too nor too short.”

This is the robe of faith of no form. It is Buddha’s teaching itself. The kesa is ultimately the complete entire expression of Buddha Dharma. It pervades the entire universe and has immeasurable width and breadth. It is Infinitely large and encompasses space in all directions. And it is infinitely small, it passes through the most incomprehensibly small spaces. It is exactly the mind seal of liberation of no form and the realization itself.

The Sixth Ancestor, Daikan Enō read a poem submitted to the Fifth Ancestor by the shuso, Jinshū, who wrote:

“Our body is the bodhi tree,

And our mind a mirror bright.

Carefully we wipe them hour by hour,

And let no dust alight.”

Enō responded with a poem of his own:

“There is no bodhi tree,

Nor stand of a mirror bright.

Since all is void,

Where can the dust alight?”

The Fifth Ancestor, Konin Zenji, transmitted the robe and the Dharma to Enō and told him to flee. While he was crossing the river, Jinshū’s followers were in pursuit of him with the intention of robbing him of his robe. When one caught him, threatened him and tried to take the dharma robe, the Sixth Ancestor threw the robe over a rock and said, “This robe is nothing but a symbol. What is the use of taking it away by force?”When his aggressor tried to lift the robe from the rock, he found it impossible to budge, as if the robe was like a huge stone. The power of the ordinary people cannot challenge it. The robe of the Sixth Ancestor is the robe of Faith. It is our Faith. It is manifestation of our living experiences and realization itself.

When Menzan was 25 years-old and staying at Rōbaian he expressed this in the verse.:

“Stitch by stitch, as you complete sewing the kesa

following the rule not to use expensive or commercial grade fabric

blue, yellow, red, and white patches are interwoven, some short, some long,

Assembling them into one finished piece, the merits of our ancestorial buddhas illuminate the mixed colored patches,

What all these teachers transmitted appears on the needle stitches.”

Dignity is manifested and expands into the unending future.

Great fields of virtue for all beings eternally.”

If you clearly understand this, the sewing kesa itself is already the completion of the One Great Matter.

One stitch after another, it is truly the teaching of our school.

One by one, each stitch is the eternity. Stich by stitch, it is the complete manifestation of the Dharma.

Thus, with each pull of the needle, we arrive at the ultimate place.

“Stitch by stitch, intimately true reality manifest. Lineage by lineage, we practice among those in all the different realms.”

Furthermore, cutting the fabric is directly cutting away delusion and attachment.

If you cannot cut away your emotional attachment, any fabric becomes impure.

If you can cut off your attachments, even silk fabric becomes pure. This cutting itself is the teaching of our school, and it is the completion of the One Great Matter.

“Wild birds just sing without intention. Flowers just smile without expectations. Stably we just sit zazen unattached.”

Staying away from likes and dislikes, leaving the attachments, the true meaning of cutting the fabric naturally manifests itself.

Mokushitsu Zenji expressed.”

“The great lofty blue mountain. the white clouds come and go. Movement and stillness manifest just as they are.”

Without attachment, without delusion, they simply appear without intention just as they are. We should really reflect upon this point until we make this teaching our own. Discarding attachments and rejecting all clinging and craving, this is the essential path to liberation.

Regarding the fabric to be used for a kesa, since ancient times the instructions have been to “eschew brocade, twilled fabric and silk”. Silk should especially be rejected since it is harmful to living beings. Fabric made from shed and discarded animal hair is the purest.

To this point, Dōgen Zenji wrote:

“As for the material of the robe, we use either silk or cotton according to conditions. It is never true that cotton is pure, and silk is impure. [And yet] we never see people disliking cotton in favor of silk. This is laughable.”

If you cannot let go of discriminations and emotional attachments, even fabric made from discarded animal hair can become impure. Only when likes and dislikes are abandoned and hating and loving have been discarded, will the nyoho-e starts to manifest itself in front of us.

“Once a monk asked the Ancient Buddha (Huineng), “Is the robe of transmission you received in the middle of the night on Mt. Huangmei (Obai) cotton or silk?”

Huineng said, “It is neither cotton nor silk. We should know that kasa is neither silk nor cotton. This is the profound teaching of the Buddha Way.”

Regarding color, In “Mahāyāna-sūtra-alaṃkāra” it says,:

“I wear a red robe. In the reflection in a jewel it resembles the color of flesh.”

In the “Nirvana Sutra” it says,:

“Drunk elephants looking at my disciples’ red robes think it is blood.”

Based on this, Dogen Zenji writes,:

“The Tathagata always wore a flesh-colored (dark red) kesa. That was the color “kashaya”.

In the Brahma's Net Sutra, it is written that “When all the kesa worn are all mixed color then it is in alignment with the Way.” (And Dōgen says,) “The buddha’s kesa transmitted by the First Ancestor was blue-black. It was made of cotton from India.”

When dying the fabric, “we always dye it with mixed colors so it keeps us away from the five desires and enables us not to give birth to greed and attachment.” This is the reason Dōgen Zenji wrote, “As the everlasting dharma of all buddhas, the robe made with funzo-e is considered the most superior.”

In dying cloth for kesa, the colors for nyohō-e are blue-black, mixed color and ochre color. Those are called Three Nyohō-e Colors.

When both body and mind are cleansed like funzo-e, only then does nyoho-e become the virtuous field of no form. Here, just as you are, you are manifesting numerous collections of dharma gates. When this transformation occurs internally and externally, your five aggregates become the manifestation of 84,000 dharma gates.

Furthermore, regarding measurements, the buddha’s body appears in the tiniest particles, bit by bit and moment by moment.　Shariputra appears as ten huge bodies filling the three worlds completely.　Subhuti appears with the immense body of an entire ocean.　In each case, the kesa is always in harmony with the Buddha’s body.

In the kesa-kudoku, Dōgen Zenji wrote, “The measurements of buddhas’ and human beings’ bodies are very different. The bodies of human beings can be measured, yet the bodies of buddhas cannot be measured. Therefore, if Shakyamuni Buddha of the present age wears the kashaya of Kasyapa Buddha of the past, it is neither too long nor too wide. Even if Maitreya Buddha wears the kashaya of Shakyamuni Buddha, it is neither too short nor too narrow. We should clearly see, determine, clarify and observe carefully that the Buddha’s body is neither long nor short.”

That is, when the kashaya worn by Shakyamuni Buddha who is 6 feet tall, is worn by Maitreya buddha who is 1000 meters tall, it is neither too short nor too narrow. Why is this? It is because the kesa is exactly the Dharma. When it is worn, the kesa is the robe of the virtuous field. In other words, when both body and mind are cleansed and become like funzo-e, then, Buddha Dharma starts to manifest.

Until now we talked about fabric, color and measurements. When these three elements are interwoven appropriately, at that time, each and every stitch passes through the material and creates a beautiful illuminating kesa. When this happens, it is the 32 characteristics of Buddha and the 80 auspicious signs appearing here and now. The material, color and measurement of thusness are the buddha’s three bodies and the buddha’s three virtues.

In “the Great Pure Gate Sutra”, the kesa is called “the robe of the removal of impurities that eliminates the three obstacles and the five impurities.”

In “the Mahāsamnipāta Sutra”, it is called “the robe of releasing defilements.” That means it helps you to leave from delusions and defilements.

In “the Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish”, it is called “the robe of leaving samsara” which refers to extinguishing the three obstacles and going beyond the distinction of inside samsara and outside samsara.

It is also called “the robe of purity” and “the robe of removing defilement”.

And it is also called “the robe of fading into translucence”.

The kesa is also called “the robe of the lotus flower” and “the robe of the mixed colors”. All of these have the meaning of breaking through delusions and abandoning attachments.

Dōgen Zenji says, “First of all, we should know that kashaya is what all buddhas venerate and take refuge in. Kashaya is buddha’s body and buddha’s mind. It is called the robe of liberation, the robe of the field of happiness, the robe of no form, the unsurpassable robe, the robe of patience, the robe of Tathagata, the robe of great compassion, the robe of the victory banner, the robe of unsurpassable supreme awakening. In this way, we should truly receive, maintain kashaya and venerate it by placing it on the head.”

It is the full 14 verses at the beginning and the end of the sutras. And it is the verse devoid of words.

We should study this point diligently until our bodies remember it, then we will respectfully receive, open and wear the kesa.

In conclusion, I will list reference books for those who want to study the kesa.

It goes without saying that those in our school should base their understanding first on the Kesa-kudoku and Dene (transmission of the robe) fascicles of Shōbōgenzō.

However, these fascicles are insufficient since they do not contain the exact information needed to stitch, measure and wear the kesa.

Among the complete collection of Buddhist teachings published in the Meiji era, there are 2 books on Dharma clothes. This includes the Hobuku kakushō – Standards of Dharma Clothes by Mokushitsu Ryōyō. In the full collection of works by Jiun of Katsuragi of the Vinaya school, there are 2 books on kesa.

Besides that, there are “the meaning of the dharma robe” both an ubriged version and extensive version, and “talks on the significance of the Kashaya”. Out of these 3, “the abridged version” is the most informative regarding the correct standard for the dharma robes of our school. Part 1 is an overview and part 2 describes in great detail from the origins of the kesa through how to dye in the form of questions and answers.

Teinin, the Vinaya teacher of Hajijisan, has a 10-volume book called “The questions and answers in Vinaya Temple”. In this collection of books, funzo-e is discussed and explained in detail. Furthermore, Menzan Zuihō wrote “Shakushi hōe kun - the points to remember regarding dharma clothes”, but the core of that writing is about “Kesa Kudoku”.

There are additional explorations and studies of the kesa from the Vinaya school. Among other sutras, you may also find reliable information from “the chapter on purity in the Sutra of Contemplation of the Mind Ground”

the Karunā-pundarika Sutra,

the Sea Dragon King Sutra,

the Jizo Jurinkyo Sutra in the 10 Dharma Chakras,

and the Sutra of the Wise and Foolish.