

On the Spiritual Merits of the Kesa

(*Kesa Kudoku*)

Translator's Introduction: One element that is markedly different between this discourse and Discourse 12: On the Transmission of the Kesa (*Den'e*) is that the present discourse has several extensive quotes from Chinese translations of Scriptural writings which Dōgen uses to clarify and support his points.

The robe and the Teaching which Buddhas have directly passed on to Buddhas, and Ancestors to Ancestors, were, beyond doubt, correctly Transmitted to China by Bodhidharma, our noble Ancestor of Mount Sūzan, and by him alone. This noble Ancestor was of the twenty-eighth generation from Shakyamuni Buddha. In India, he was the twenty-eighth in line to have legitimately received the Transmission, and, as the Twenty-eighth Ancestor, he came to China where he became known as the First Chinese Ancestor. Those of Chinese nationality made five Transmissions until coming to Daikan Enō, who became the thirty-third generation Ancestor, and was called the Sixth Chinese Ancestor. Known as the Thirty-third Ancestor Meditation Master Daikan Enō, he received the genuine Transmission of the robe and the Teaching in the middle of the night whilst on Mount Ōbai. He watched over and protected the robe for the rest of his life, and it is still enshrined in Hōrin-ji Temple on Mount Sōkei.

Successive generations of Chinese emperors have respectfully requested that this robe be brought to their court so that they might make offerings and reverently bow to it. They are persons who, as spiritual guardians, have protected it. During the T'ang dynasty, the emperors Chung-tsung, Su-tsung, and T'ai-tsung repeatedly had it brought back to court so that they might make offerings to it. Whenever they requested it or had it sent back, they would have an emissary accompany it and would issue an edict to that effect. On one occasion, Emperor T'ai-tsung, in returning the Buddha's robe to Mount Sōkei, issued the following edict, "I am now pleased to entrust to Commander General Liu Chung-ching, Pacifier of Our Nation, the returning of this robe with all courtesies. We declare this robe to be a national treasure. Venerable Abbot, I pray that you will safely enshrine it in your temple, placing it under the rigorous care and protection of those monks of your

community who have personally received from you the tenets of our religion, never letting the robe fall into neglect.”

Truly, it would be better than having sway over the three-thousand great-thousandfold worlds—which are as countless as the sands of the Ganges—just to have the opportunity, as ruler of some small, present-day country, to actually see the Buddha’s robe and make venerative offerings to it, for such would truly be a good life within one’s cycle of birth and death; it would, indeed, be the ultimate in one’s life.

Surely, nowhere within the three thousand worlds in which the influence of Buddhism has extended has the kesa* been absent. Be that as it may, the only one to receive the Buddha’s kesa that had been passed on from person to person, from successor to successor, was our Ancestor of Mount Sūzan in times long gone. The Buddha’s kesa was not accorded to any other, subsidiary disciple. Even though the Transmission through the Bodhisattva* Bhadrāpala, a subsidiary descendant of the Twenty-seventh Ancestor, was, beyond doubt, extended to Dharma Teacher Jō in the fifth century, the genuine passing on of the Buddha’s kesa was not involved. Likewise, the Fourth Chinese Ancestor, Great Master Daii Dōshin, ferried Meditation Master Hōyū of Mount Gozu to the Other Shore, but he did not pass the Buddha’s kesa on to him. Well, even though someone may not have received Transmission from a direct heir, nevertheless, the Tathagata’s genuine Dharma is never devoid of spiritual merit, so for thousands, nay, myriads of eons, Its benefits will be great and far reaching. And, obviously, anyone who has not been Transmitted is not to be considered comparable to someone who has been Transmitted by a direct heir.

Thus, if commoners or those of more lofty status were to accept and keep to a kesa, they would need to have passed on to them the genuine Transmission which the Buddhas and Ancestors have passed on. In India and China, during those periods of the genuine and the superficial teaching of the Dharma, householders still kept to the kesa that they had accepted. But now, in these weak and degenerate times in a remote land like ours, those who shave their heads and beards and call themselves disciples of the Buddha do not keep to the kesa that they have received. Alas, they still do not believe, or know, or clearly understand that they should keep to what they have accepted, to say nothing of their lack of knowledge about its materials, colors, or measurements, much less of the ways to wear one.

* See *Glossary*.



The kesa, from ancient times, has been called ‘the garment of liberation’, for it can free us from all our obstructions, be they from the karmic* effects of our past deeds, from our defiling passions, or from the effects of our rebirth in one of the six worlds* of existence. Should a dragon be able to obtain a single thread from a kesa, it will be delivered from its three forms of burning pain.¹ Should an ox be able to touch a kesa with even one horn, its past defilements will spontaneously disappear. Upon realizing Buddhahood, every Buddha, without exception, was wearing a kesa, which is obviously why wearing one is described as the most venerable and highest of spiritual merits.

True, we have been born in a remote country and have been exposed to the Dharma in Its final days, sad to say, but even so, in that we have encountered the robe and the Teaching as received by Buddha after Buddha for generation after generation, what greater joy could there be? Which other tradition has correctly Transmitted both the robe and the Dharma of the Venerable Shakyamuni as we have straightforwardly Transmitted them? Even if, in the space of a single day, we were to renounce our physical life for times as countless as the sands of the Ganges, we should still humbly make offerings to both the robe and the Dharma. Indeed, we should vow that, upon encountering them in life after life, for generation after generation, we will humbly raise them above our head, make offerings to them, and venerate them.

Even though we are separated from the Buddha’s native land by more than a hundred thousand leagues of mountains and seas too difficult to traverse, nevertheless, spurred on by our good deeds in some past life, these mountains and seas do not stand as obstacles blocking our way, nor have we ever been dismissed or shunned as muddle-headed, ignorant provincials. Having respectfully encountered this genuine Teaching, we put It into practice day and night to the best of our ability; keeping to this kesa which we have respectfully accepted, we guard and protect it, constantly taking joy in it. How could this possibly be due to the cultivation of spiritual merits under the tutelage of just one or two Buddhas? It must be due wholly to the cultivation of all kinds of spiritual merits under the tutelage of Buddhas as numerous as the sands of the Ganges. Even if it were due to our own efforts, we should feel respect for the robe and the Dharma and should enjoy heartfelt gratitude. We should cordially show our gratitude to the ancestral Masters for their profound kindness in Transmitting the Dharma to us. Since even

1. Namely, suffering from fiery heat, from fierce desert winds, and from being devoured by a garuda bird.

animals repay kindness, how could humans fail to understand kindness? If people do not recognize kindness, they must be even denser than animals.

When it comes to the spiritual merits of this Buddha robe and this Buddha Dharma, if there had not been Ancestral Masters who Transmitted the Buddha's True Dharma, then the rest of us would not yet be able to clarify, much less comprehend, what these merits are. If you are able to take delight in seeking out the trail left by the Buddhas, you will enjoy this Dharma all the more.

Even after a hundred thousand myriad generations, people will be able to recognize this genuine Transmission as the genuine Transmission. This will be the Buddha Dharma; the proof of Its authenticity will undoubtedly be evident.



Do not liken the Transmission to adding water to milk, since It more closely resembles a crown prince ascending to the throne. When we do make use of milk, even though it is that which has been diluted with water, we should still go ahead and use it if there should happen to be no other milk than that. Even if we have not added water to it, we should not use oil in its place, or lacquer, or wine.² The genuine Transmission may also be likened to this analogy. Even though someone is a run-of-the-mill disciple of a mediocre teacher, if there is a genuine Transmission, it will be a suitable time to 'make use of milk'. But the genuine Transmission of Buddha to Buddha and Ancestor to Ancestor is more like the enthronement of a crown prince. Even the secular Confucian teachings admonish us not to wear clothing which differs from that officially worn during the time of the previous ruler, so why would a disciple of the Buddha wear any type of robe other than that which the Buddha wore?



Starting in the tenth year of the Eihei era (67 C.E.), during the reign of the Later Han dynasty emperor Hsiao-ming, monks and lay disciples went back and forth between India in the west and their homelands in the east, ceaselessly following on the heels of their predecessors, as they say. Even so, none of them reported encountering in India an Ancestral Master of the genuine Transmission from Buddha to Buddha and from Ancestor to Ancestor; none of these travelers had a record of the lineage of the Face-to-Face Transmission direct from the Tathagata. They just attended on teachers of Scriptures and Scriptural commentaries, and brought back copies of Scriptures and scholarly texts written in Sanskrit. Among them, none spoke of having met an Ancestral Master who was a

2. Because milk is still milk even in a diluted form.

genuine heir of the Buddha Dharma, nor did anyone report the existence of an Ancestral Master who had passed on to them the Buddha's kesa. It is quite clear that they had not crossed the threshold into the deeper significance of the term 'Buddha Dharma'. People like these have not clearly grasped the import of the phrase 'the genuine Transmission of the Buddhas and Ancestors'.



When the Tathagata Shakyamuni conferred on Makakashō the Dharma of Supreme Wisdom—which is the Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching—He passed on to him at the same time the kesa that Kashō Buddha had directly Transmitted to Him. It is the kesa that generation after generation of genuine heirs received down to Meditation Master Daikan of Mount Sōkei, who was the thirty-third heir. The material, color, and dimensions of that kesa have been passed on first-hand. Since then, the Dharma descendants of Seigen and Nangaku have directly Transmitted the Dharma in person, employing the ways taught by the Ancestors for wearing a kesa, and following the methods taught by the Ancestors for constructing them.³ If someone has not learned the deeper meaning behind the method for washing and cleansing a kesa, as well as the procedure for accepting and keeping to one—both of which have been conferred face-to-face through the generations of successors—there is no way for that person to know of them.



The kesa is said to be of three types: the five-paneled robe, the seven-paneled robe, and the large robe of nine or more panels. Even those whose practice is the very finest accept just these three robes; they do not hoard additional robes. They use just these three robes, which are sufficient for their bodily needs.

When conducting daily business or attending to daily duties within the monastery, or when going outside to see to large or small matters, we wear a five-paneled robe. Upon our entering among the Sangha to engage in all manner of good spiritual acts,⁴ we wear a seven-paneled robe. To help inculcate respect and trust whilst giving Teaching to both commoners and those in lofty positions, we should, by all means, wear a large robe of nine or more panels. Also, when alone in our quarters, we wear the five-paneled robe; when coming together with the

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3. Seigen and Nangaku were both direct Dharma heirs of Daikan Enō, thereby forming two branches within the Zen tradition.
 4. A reference to one's joining with fellow members of the Sangha for formal meditation periods and religious ceremonies.

Sangha, we wear the seven-paneled robe; when we enter a ruler's residence or go into a populous area, we should, by all means, wear the large robe. Further, in accord with times of warm weather, we wear the five-paneled robe; when the weather turns cold, we add the seven-paneled robe; and when the cold becomes intense, we also add on the large robe.

Once, in days long gone, as a mid-winter night came on, the weather turned so cold that it cracked open the bamboo. At eventide, the Tathagata was wearing a five-paneled robe. As the night grew more and more chill, He added a seven-paneled robe. In the final hours of the night, the cold weather had grown ever more intense, so He added on His large robe. The Buddha immediately had the thought, "In the generations yet to come, all good disciples who find the cold unbearable will be able to wrap themselves up sufficiently with these three robes."



The Methods for Wearing the Kesa

The usual method is to keep the right shoulder bare. There is a method of wearing the kesa over both shoulders, which was a custom of the Tathagata and of the more elderly and senior monks.⁵ Although it is described simply as 'covering both shoulders', there are times when the chest is exposed, and times when the chest is covered. The covering of both shoulders is a time for wearing a large kesa of at least sixty pieces.⁶

When wearing an ordinary kesa, we bring both upper corners together at the left arm and shoulder, placing one atop the other. We bring the left edge to the front, letting it ride atop the right vertical edge which has been tucked in between the left arm and the torso; the left edge is draped over the left arm.⁷ With a large kesa, we put the front corner over the left shoulder and drape it so that it hangs down in back. In addition to these methods, there are various other methods for wearing a kesa, which you should look into as part of your training and practice.

During the centuries of the Chinese Liang, Ch'en, Sui, T'ang, and Sung dynasties, many of the scholars of both the Greater* and the Lesser Courses* abandoned their preoccupation with lecturing on Scriptures, realizing that this was not the ultimate goal. Faring on, they strove to explore the Teaching of the genuine Transmission of the Buddhas and Ancestors, at which time they invariably

5. The word Dōgen uses for 'elderly' implies age fifty and over.

6. The sixty-piece robe refers to a fifteen-paneled kesa.

7. Dōgen gives a somewhat more detailed description of this method in the preceding Discourse 12: On the Transmission of the Kesa (*Den'e*), p. 128.

discarded their previous worldly clothing and took on the kesa that the Buddhas and Ancestors had correctly passed on. This was truly their abandonment of what was false and their return to what was upright.



The True Teaching of the Tathagata originated in India, as we all know. Many past and present teachers have held to the shallow views of common folk, which are colored by emotionalism and narrow-mindedness. Because the Realm of Buddha and the realms of sentient beings are beyond such notions as ‘having limits’ or ‘being without limits’, the Teachings, practices, and reasoning of both the Greater and Lesser Courses will not fit within the narrow-minded thinking of common folk today. And, at the same time, there are those in China who absurdly argue that India was not the source, but that China was, and they put forth this parochial view as their own bright new idea, taking it to be Buddha Dharma. As a consequence, if those today who have awakened to their Buddha Nature are determined to accept and keep to the kesa, they should accept and keep to the genuinely Transmitted kesa; they should not accept or keep to some kesa fashioned according to someone’s ‘bright new idea’.

The ‘genuinely Transmitted kesa’ refers to the one genuinely Transmitted from Shōrin-ji Monastery through Mount Sōkei, and it is the one that has been received by generation after generation of the Tathagata’s successors without missing even a single generation.⁸ What those disciples of the Dharma and their Dharma disciples wore is, precisely, the genuinely Transmitted kesa. What has been newly fashioned in China is not of the genuine Transmission. Now, the members of the monastic assembly who came from India all wore the same style of kesa as that which was genuinely Transmitted by the Buddhas and Ancestors; not even one of those monks ever wore a kesa like those new-fangled Chinese ones which were fashioned by that bunch who devote themselves to a scholarly study of the monastic regulations. Ill-informed folk may trust the kesa of scholastics; those who are clear-minded toss it aside.



Broadly speaking, the spiritual merits of the kesa—which was passed on from Buddha to Buddha and Ancestor to Ancestor—are clear, and these merits are easy to accept and trust in. The kesa’s genuine Transmission has been duly inherited; its original form has been personally handed down, and it actually exists

8. Shōrin-ji Monastery is associated with Bodhidharma and Mount Sōkei with Daikan Enō.

here and now. The practice of accepting and keeping to it has come down to the present, along with the inherited Dharma. The Ancestral Masters who have received and kept to it, as both Masters and disciples, are all ones who have realized the same Truth and Transmitted Its Dharma. As a consequence, we should construct our kesas according to the methods correctly passed on by the Buddhas and Ancestors, because Their method alone is of the genuine Transmission. This is what everyone has long come to know and understand, be they everyday folk or saintly ones, commoners or lofty ones, dragons or deities.

The kesa came into being to accord with the dissemination of the Dharma. Once it has been wrapped around a body and accepted, and is being kept to for a second—or even a flash of a moment—it will become a veritable amulet, safeguarding us in our resolve to realize Supreme Wisdom.⁹ Should we imbue our trusting heart with a single line of Scripture or with the whole of the kesa verse, It will be a seed for our bright-mindedness for lengthy eons to come, and will ultimately take us to Supreme Wisdom. Moreover, if we infuse our body and mind with a single Teaching or a single good practice, the result will be the same. The thoughts in our mind arise and disappear moment after moment, yet nary a one permanently abides; our body is being born and is ceasing moment after moment, yet nowhere is there a place where it permanently abides. Nevertheless, the spiritual merits of our practice will undoubtedly have their time of fruition, which will liberate us. So the kesa is not simply a manufactured thing, nor is it something that spontaneously arises in nature, nor is it something that has always existed somewhere, nor is it something that exists nowhere: it is That which Buddhas, and Buddhas alone, all ultimately realize. Be that as it may, the spiritual merits from what is realized by practitioners who accept and keep to the kesa will undoubtedly come to full fruition, and will undoubtedly take them to the Ultimate. As to those who have sown no good seeds previously, even if they were to undergo one or two lifetimes more, up through immeasurable lifetimes, they would not be able to see a kesa, or wear a kesa, or accept a kesa with a trusting heart, or clearly understand what a kesa really is. If we look at China and Japan today, we will see that there are people unable to do so, but not because they are rich or poor, nor because they are dim-witted or sharp. Clearly, the wearing of a kesa is due to the sowing of good seeds in the past.

9. Dōgen is not asserting that the kesa has some inherent magical property which wards off evil; rather, it protects the wearer by serving as a constant reminder of the purpose for which he or she donned the robe in the first place, as well as serving as an outer sign to others of the wearer's spiritual commitment.

As a consequence, those who accept and keep to the kesa should rejoice in their having sown good seeds in the past, and should not doubt that they have piled up merits and accumulated virtues. Those who have not yet acquired a kesa should aspire to one and, right away in this life, busy themselves with planting good seeds. Those who are unable to accept and keep to it due to some spiritual impediment, should, out of shame and remorse, admit their failings to all the Buddhas and Tathagatas, as well as to the Triple Treasure of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. How sentient beings in other countries must wish that the Tathagata's robe and Dharma had been directly Transmitted to them in the same way as They were Transmitted in China, and that They were now present in their country too! What a deep sense of embarrassment they must feel; what sorrow and regret they must have that there has been no genuine Transmission in their country. Through what good fortune have we encountered the Teaching whereby the World-honored Tathagata directly Transmitted the robe and the Dharma? Surely, it is due to the agency of great spiritual merits accumulated from past lives that were spent in training to realize True Wisdom.



In this present-day, degenerate world when the Dharma is in Its last phase, some feel no shame for themselves that they lack the genuine Transmission, while others envy or resent those who have received the genuine Transmission. I suspect that these people may well be a gang of hellions. The way things are for them now and the state in which they now dwell have sprung from their previous deeds and are not what is truly real. Were they to turn themselves around and simply respect the genuine Transmission of the Buddha Dharma, then this would be to really take refuge in learning what Buddha is.



Broadly speaking, we must realize that the kesa is what all Buddhas revere and devote themselves to. It is the Body of Buddha; it is the Mind of Buddha. It is called 'the garment of liberation'; it is called 'the robe that is a fertile field of blessings'; it is called 'the formless robe'; it is called 'the unsurpassed robe'; it is called 'the robe of patient forbearance'; it is called 'the robe of a Tathagata'; it is called 'the robe of great benevolence and great compassion'; it is called 'the robe that is the banner of victory'; it is called 'the robe of supreme, fully perfected enlightenment'. Truly, in these ways we should accept it, keep to it, and humbly raise it above our heads. Because it is as it is spoken of, it is not something to be altered to make it conform to some personal fancy.



As to the material for a robe, we use silk or cotton cloth, as it suits us. Cotton is not necessarily ‘pure’, any more than silk is ‘impure’. And to choose silk because you look down on cotton is unwarranted, laughable even. The usual approach of the Buddhas has been, beyond doubt, to consider a robe made from waste cloth as the best.

There are ten types of waste cloth, four of which are charred cloth, cloth that has been chewed by an ox, cloth that rats have gnawed on, and cloth that was previously used for a shroud. People in all five regions of India discard such types of cloth in back alleys and barren fields. Since they are considered the same as bodily waste, they are called ‘waste cloth’. Trainees collect them, wash and dye them, then sew them together and use the robe for furbishing their body. Among these are various scraps of silk and cotton. Trainees should abandon any discriminatory notions about silk and cotton, and concentrate on the meaning of ‘discarded waste material’. Long ago, when the Buddha was in one of His past lives, He was washing a robe of just such waste cloth in Lake Anavatapta. The dragon who was the lord of the lake praised Him, rained flowers down upon Him, and respectfully bowed to Him. In addition, there are some among the Scriptural teachers of the Lesser Course who hold to the theory of transformed thread,¹⁰ a view which has no foundation and at which persons of the Greater Course must smile, for what thread is not the product of some form of transformation? O you ancient scholarly teachers, even though you may believe your ears when you hear the word ‘transformation’, you doubt your eyes when you actually see a transformation.

Obviously, when you are picking up waste material, it may include cotton that resembles silk and silk that resembles cotton. Regional customs differ in myriad ways, so that there is no telling how something was manufactured, for it is not something that the naked eye can readily determine. Once we have obtained such material, we should not argue over whether it is silk or cotton, but should refer to it as discarded waste. Even though ordinary humans or lofty beings may ‘continue to exist’ as waste matter after death, they will not be sentient beings, they will simply be waste matter. Even though a dead pine tree or chrysanthemum should ‘continue to exist’ as waste matter, they will not be non-sentient beings, they will just be waste matter. O you ancient scholarly ones, when you accept and trust in the principle that waste material does not mean silk or cotton, or gold or

10. An ancient Indian view that silk is thread which is created by a living creature; it is not naturally occurring of itself.

silver, or jade or jewels, waste material will be what manifests before your very eyes. Since you had not yet let go of your opinions about silk and cotton, waste material was something you had not even dreamt of.



A certain monk once asked the ancient Buddha Daikan Enō, “Is the robe passed on to you on Huang-mei Mountain in the middle of the night one made of cotton or one made of silk? Pray, tell me, what on earth is it made of?”

The ancient Buddha replied, “It is not cotton, nor is it silk.”

Understand that a kesa is neither silk nor cotton. This instruction on the Buddha’s Way is profound and difficult to grasp.

The Venerable Shōnawashu (‘He of Hempen Clothing’) was the Third Indian Ancestor connected with the Treasure House of the Dharma. From the time he was born, he spent his whole life inseparable from his robe. This robe was, to be sure, a conventional garment whilst he was still at home, but when he left home to become a monk, it became a kesa.

Also, once the female monk Shukra (‘She Who is Spotless’) had taken her Bodhisattva vows and put on the cotton robe, then, life after life, even during the periods between lives, she was inseparable from the robe. On that very day when she met Shakyamuni Buddha and left home to become a monk, the ordinary robe that she had acquired at birth was immediately transformed into a kesa, the same as with the Venerable Shōnawashu.

Be very clear about this: a kesa is beyond being silk or cotton or any other type of cloth. Moreover, the spiritual merits of the Buddha Dharma transform all thoughts and things, physical and mental, just as in these examples. The principle is unambiguous: when you leave home to take the Precepts and become a monk, whatever your body and mind experience as objective or subjective is transformed. It is only because you are confused or ignorant that you do not realize this. None of the Buddhas ever taught that this principle applied only to Shōnawashu and Shukra, and therefore does not apply to you. So, have no doubts about the many spiritual benefits that you receive. Obviously, you should assiduously explore such a principle as the one just described.



The kesa that someone dons when taking the Precepts is not necessarily of cotton or of silk, for indeed the Buddha’s edifying influence is difficult to comprehend. The precious Jewel within is beyond anything that those who

calculate grains of sand are capable of finding.¹¹ So, we should probe deeply to clarify what has dimensions and what is beyond measurement, as well as what has a form and what is beyond form. This is what our Ancestral Masters who traveled to and from India and China investigated and correctly Transmitted. Should a person encounter and listen to someone who is doubtlessly making clear the genuine Transmission of the Ancestors, and then vainly refuse to accept the genuine Transmission from this Ancestral Master, such a person's attitude would be hard to condone. It must be due to a lack of trust as a result of befuddled and foolish thinking. Such a person is one who discards what is true in order to pursue some fabrication, one who forsakes the Source in a desire for trifles. This may well take the form of a belittling contempt for the Tathagata.

Folks who would give rise to Supreme Wisdom should always accept the Transmission passed on to them by an Ancestral Master. Not only have we encountered the Buddha Dharma, which is so hard to come by, but also, as the Dharma descendants of the genuine Transmission of the Buddha kesa, we have the opportunity to experience It directly, to explore and learn from It, to accept It, and to keep to It. This, accordingly, is our encountering the Tathagata; it is our hearing the Buddha give voice to the Dharma; it is our letting the Buddha's radiance shine forth; it is our experiencing what the Buddha experienced; it is our directly Transmitting Buddha Mind; it is our reaching the very Marrow of Buddha; it is our putting on the kesa of Shakyamuni Buddha, which is before our very eyes, and it is Shakyamuni Buddha right before our very eyes, entrusting the kesa to us. Through our devoutly following the Buddha, we have humbly accepted the kesa.



The Methods for Washing the Kesa

Put the unfolded kesa into a clean washtub and leave it to soak for about four hours in boiling hot water that has been incensed. Another method is to immerse it in clean boiling water and wait until the water has cooled down. Nowadays, we customarily use hot ash-water. Here in Japan, ash-water refers to hot water containing lye. When the ash-water has cooled down, rinse the kesa in clean, fresh, hot water several times, but do not scrub it with your hands or tread on it with your feet. Continue in this manner until the dirt and grease have been removed. Then, rinse it in cold water in which some incense, such as aloes or sandalwood, has been mixed. After that, hang it on a clean clothes pole to dry. After it has completely

11. A reference to scholars who are unrelenting in their involvement with making distinctions over terms and their meanings.

dried, fold it, put it on a high place, burn incense and strew flowers,¹² circumambulate it to the right several times, and respectfully bow to it. Make three, six, or nine full bows, hands in gasshō,* then kneel with hands in gasshō and, holding the kesa in both hands, recite the kesa verse. After this, stand up and respectfully put the kesa on in the usual manner.



The World-honored One, in advising His great assembly, said:

In the ancient past when I was in the presence of Ratnagarbha Buddha—the Buddha Who is the Storehouse of the Treasure—I was the Bodhisattva of Great Compassion. At that time, as the Bodhisattva-Mahasattva* of Great Compassion, I made the following vow before Ratnagarbha Buddha, saying, “World-honored One, when I have finally become a Buddha, there may be sentient beings who have entered into My Teaching and, leaving home to become monks, have donned a kesa. They may include monks or laity, male or female, who show a lack of faith by breaching grave Precepts, putting false views into practice, or acting contemptuously towards the Triple Treasure, thereby accumulating for themselves all sorts of heavy defilement. But if they give rise to a feeling of respect for even the span of a single thought, so that they regard the large patchwork robe with esteem, or if they give birth to a feeling of respect so that they regard the World-honored One, or the Dharma, or the Sangha with esteem, then, O World-honored One, I declare that, if even one among such sentient beings in any of the Three Courses* is incapable of receiving confirmation of ultimate Buddhahood, and, as a result, that person regresses or completely turns away, then I have deceived and misled all present-day Buddhas within all worlds everywhere for countless, limitless, immeasurable eons, and I will surely fail to realize supreme, fully perfected enlightenment.

12. Whether Dōgen intended the conventional phrase referring to incense and flowers to be taken literally is uncertain. ‘Strewing flowers’ is sometimes understood to mean ‘reading Scriptures’. Burning incense and strewing flowers is also associated with the offering of one’s training. For more about the metaphoric meaning of these phrases, see “Bodhidharma’s Discourse on Pure Meditation” in *Buddhist Writings on Meditation and Daily Practice*, (Shasta Abbey Press, 1994), pp. 369-71.

“World-honored One, after I have become a Buddha, should any being—be it a dragon or a demon, human or non-human—be able to don this kesa, revere and make offerings to it, reverence and praise it, then should that being be able to catch sight of the smallest bit of this kesa, he or she will be able to keep from regressing from within the Three Courses.¹³

“If there are sentient beings pressed by hunger and thirst—be they spirits who are violent because of their dire poverty, or persons of humblest birth, or beings who act like hungry ghosts*—should they acquire a bit of a kesa, even four inches square, then they will be able to have their fill of what they thirst and hunger for and will be able to realize fully what they have prayed ever so long for.

“When there are sentient beings who are acting with each other in offensive ways, stirring up malicious and hostile thoughts and intentions, and keeping things roiling until a fight breaks out—whether any of those engaged in such fighting be dragons, fierce spirits, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, kinnaras, mahoragas, kumbandhas, or pishachas, human or non-human¹⁴—should any of them call this kesa to mind, then, due to the influence of the kesa, they will give rise to a heart that is compassionate, a heart that is soft and flexible, a heart that is free of malice and hostility, a heart that is tranquil and devoid of defiling passions, a virtuous heart that is well-tamed and subdued, and thereby be able to return to a state of immaculacy.

“Should there be someone who is in the midst of an armed conflict, a civil litigation, or a criminal prosecution, and should this person, whilst holding onto a fragment of this kesa, go among those involved and, for self-protection, make offerings to it, show reverence for it, and venerate it, this person and others like him will lose the inclination to injure others through aggression, to coerce them, or to

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13. That is, after having reverently accepted a kesa and put it on, some may become so accustomed to wearing it that they forget that they have it on, but should they then catch sight of even a bit of it, this will remind them of why they donned the kesa in the first place, which will enable them to keep from regressing in their training and practice.
 14. ‘Dragons...pishachas’ comprise a list of quasi-mythical beings who were originally given to violent or seductive acts but who, upon conversion to Buddhism, became spiritual guardians, each type having governance over some protective function. Hence, they may manifest as some human or non-human being fulfilling that function.

treat them with ridicule and scorn. Constantly being able to surpass others in this regard, such a person will come through all such difficulties as these.

“World-honored One, if my kesa were unable to fulfill the saintly merits of such acts as these aforementioned five, then I have deceived and misled all present-day Buddhas within all worlds everywhere for countless, limitless, immeasurable eons, and will surely fail to realize supreme, fully perfected enlightenment in the future and to do the work of a Buddha. Moreover, having strayed from the virtuous Dharma, I would certainly be incapable of exposing and destroying whatever leads others off the Path.”

O my good disciples, the Tathagata Ratnagarbha then extended His golden-hued right arm and, rubbing the crown of the head of this Bodhisattva of Great Compassion, said warmly, “Well put, well put, my splendid disciple! What you have said is a great, precious treasure that is both wise and virtuous. You will ultimately realize supreme, fully perfected enlightenment. This kesa garment will be able to fulfill these five saintly merits and create great benefits.”

O my virtuous disciples, as the Bodhisattva-Mahasattva of Great Compassion, having heard the Buddha’s praise, I felt a joy arising in My heart that made it dance beyond measure. It then happened that the Buddha extended His golden-hued arm, its hand with its long, webbed fingers as soft and supple as a heavenly robe. Once He had rubbed My Bodhisattva head, My Bodhisattva body was immediately transformed, resembling the figure of a young man of twenty.

O my good disciples, the great crowd in that assembly, all the various creatures, such as the dragons, the celestial beings, the gandharvas, both the human and the non-human, put their hands in gasshō as an offering, bestowing many kinds of blossoms on Me as the Bodhisattva of Great Compassion, and they danced and made music, offering this as well. After they had praised Me in these various ways, they dwelt in silence.

From the time that the Tathagata was in the world up to this very day, whenever bodhisattvas and monks search through the Scriptures and monastic regulations for the merits of the kesa, without fail, they take these five merits to be the principal ones.

Truly, the kesa is the Buddha robe for all Buddhas in the three temporal worlds of past, present, and future. Though we say that its spiritual merits are beyond measure, to attain the kesa amidst the Teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha must surpass the attaining of a kesa amidst the Teaching of any other Buddha. Should you ask why, well, long ago when Shakyamuni Buddha, as the Bodhisattva-Mahasattva of Great Compassion, was in a state conducive to His realizing Buddhahood, He made five hundred great vows in the presence of Ratnagarbha Buddha, in particular taking solemn vows like the five just mentioned on the spiritual merits of the kesa. These merits, moreover, must surely be limitless and beyond the mind's ability to grasp. Consequently, what we call 'the genuine Transmission down to today of the Skin and Flesh, Bones and Marrow of the World-honored One' is the kesa robe. The Ancestral Masters who genuinely Transmitted the Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching have invariably made a proper Transmission of the kesa. Sentient beings who have kept to this robe when it was passed on to them and who have humbly placed it atop the crown of their head as an act of respect have invariably realized the Way within two or three lifetimes. Even if someone were to put one on as a joke or for some personal profit, this act will be a cause for his or her realizing the Way.



Our Ancestral Master Nāgārjuna once said:

If people who have left home to be within the Buddha Dharma break the Precepts and lapse into impure ways, once they have brought their impure ways to an end and obtained liberation from them, they will be like the female monk Utpalavarna ('She Who Has the Hue of a Lotus Blossom') in the Jataka Scripture on past lives. While the Buddha was in the world, this female monk attained the Six Transcendent Abilities¹⁵ and realized arhathood.* She once entered the house of a member of the nobility, and, continually extolling the Dharma of leaving home to become a monk, she admonished the wives and daughters of the noble, saying, "My sisters, you should leave home and become monks."

The noblewomen all replied, "We are young and our bodies are comely. For us to keep to the Precepts would indeed be hard, and we would surely break them on occasion."

15. Dōgen will explain what these are later in this discourse.

The monk replied, “If you break the Precepts, then you break them. Just leave lay life behind!”

They then asked her, “If we break the Precepts, then we shall certainly fall into some hellish state, so why would you have us break them?”

She replied, “If you fall into some hell, then you fall into some hell.”

All the women broke out in laughter and said, “In a hell we will receive the consequences of our defiling deeds, so why would you have us fall into such a state?”

The monk replied, “In recalling my own past lives, there was a time when I had become a prostitute. I dressed up in all sorts of clothes and told the age-old licentious stories. One day, I dressed up as a female monk, just as a joke. As a direct result of this I became a female monk in Kashō Buddha’s time. After a while, I took to depending on my aristocratic demeanor and gave rise to pride and arrogance, thereby breaking monastic prohibitions as well as Precepts. Because of the defilement from breaking monastic prohibitions and Precepts, I fell into a hellish state where I suffered the consequences of my various defiling acts. After I had suffered these consequences, I met Shakyamuni Buddha and left home to become a monk, ultimately obtaining the Six Transcendent Abilities and realizing arhathood. Due to this, I have come to know that if we leave home and take the Precepts, even though we may later break Them, we will realize arhathood because of the karmic effect of the Precepts. If I had merely done bad things without having any effects from the Precepts, I would not have realized the Way.”

Nāgārjuna then continued with Utpalavarna’s narrative:

“In times long past, I had fallen into hellish states for generation after generation, getting out of some hell only to become a wicked person once again. When that wicked person died, again a hell was entered, and nothing whatsoever had been gained. Now, because of this, I have come to realize that if someone leaves home to be a monk and takes the Precepts, even though that person later breaks the Precepts, because of once having taken Them, that person will obtain the fruits of the Way.”

The first cause for this female monk, who had the hue of a lotus blossom, to realize the arhat's way was not something meritorious on her part, but just her having donned a kesa as a joke, and, due to the merits of that, she had now realized the Way. In a second lifetime, she met Kashō Buddha and became a female monk. In a third lifetime, she met Shakyamuni Buddha and became a great arhat, equipped with the Three Insights and the Six Transcendent Abilities. The Three Insights are the awareness of what is really transpiring within us, the awareness of what has brought about the karmic effects from our past lives, and the awareness of whether or not our defiling passions have truly come to an end. The Six Transcendent Abilities are the ability to freely deal with external situations or circumstances as needed, the ability to know what is really on the minds of others, the ability to see what is really transpiring with others, the ability to hear what others are really saying, the ability to grasp what is really causing people to behave the way they do, and the ability to determine whether or not someone has truly brought his or her defiling passions to an end. Truly, when she was just a person who was doing wicked deeds, she would die only to enter a hellish state. Emerging from that hellish state, she would again become someone doing wicked deeds. But when she felt the impact of the Precepts, even though she would fall into some hellish state due to her breaking of the Precepts, nevertheless, They were ultimately the cause of her realizing the Way. Now, anyone who may put on a kesa as a joke will still be able to realize the Way by his or her third go-round. How, then, could anyone who put on a kesa with a pure and trusting heart for the sake of Supreme Wisdom fail to fully realize its spiritual merits, to say nothing of the spiritual merits realized by one who respectfully accepts and keeps to it during his lifetime and humbly raises it atop the crown of his head, for such merits are indeed so vast as to be immeasurable.



Whoever gives rise to the Mind that seeks the Way will undoubtedly accept and keep to the kesa, humbly raising it atop the crown of his or her head. To have encountered such a fortunate existence and yet fail to sow the seeds of one's Buddhahood, how pitiful that would be! To have received the body of a human being in the Southern Continent of Jambudvīpa,* to have met with the Dharma of Shakyamuni Buddha by being born in proximity to an Ancestral Master who is in the direct line of inheritors of the Buddha Dharma, and then, to no profit, to pass up accepting a kesa that has been directly Transmitted from person to person, a kesa that points directly to one's Buddha Nature—could there be anything more pathetic?



Now, as to the genuine Transmission of the kesa, a genuine Transmission from an Ancestral Master is, in and of itself, the genuine inheritance. It is not something that any other teacher can equal. And even the spiritual merits from accepting and keeping to the kesa whilst following a teacher who has not been Transmitted will be exceedingly profound. How much more, then, will merit accrue to us from our accepting and keeping to a kesa that we received from a genuine teacher, one who had legitimately been given a kesa personally by someone in the Transmission line! Certainly, we will then be a child or grandchild of the Tathagata, for we will have had correctly Transmitted to us the Skin and Flesh, Bones and Marrow of the Tathagata. In sum, the kesa has come to be legitimately Transmitted by all Buddhas everywhere, at all times, without interruption. It is what all Buddhas, bodhisattvas, shravakas,* and pratyekabuddhas* alike, everywhere and at all times, have come to safeguard and protect.



In constructing a kesa, take coarse cotton cloth as your base. When you do not have coarse cotton cloth, use a fine cotton cloth. If you have neither coarse nor fine cotton, use raw silk cloth. If you have neither silk nor cotton cloth, then use, say, a wool twill or a thin silk gauze, all of which the Tathagata endorsed. In a country that does not have any variety of silk, cotton, or twill, the Tathagata also permitted leather kesas.

Speaking in general terms, when dyeing a kesa, we should use blue-green, yellow, red, black, or purple. Whichever color we choose, it should be a loaded color.¹⁶ The Tathagata always wore a flesh-colored kesa, for this is the color of the Kesa. The Buddha's kesa that the First Ancestor passed on to succeeding Ancestors was blue-black in color, and its cloth was of Indian cotton. It is now on Mount Sōkei. In India, it was passed on twenty-eight times, and in China, five times. Now, the descendants of the ancient Buddha Daikan Enō have all had Transmitted to them the ancient custom of the Buddha's robe and have kept to it, which is something that is beyond other monks.

Generally speaking, there are three types of kesa. The first is a waste cloth robe, the second a fur robe, and the third a refurbished robe. 'Waste cloth' refers to what was discussed earlier. A fur robe is made from the fur and down of beasts and

16. That is, not a pure, intense, primary color, but one whose brightness has been toned down by mixing some other color in with it.

birds. Should trainees be unable to obtain waste cloth, they may gather this down and make it into a robe. A refurbished robe refers to one whose worn spots and tears have been patched and which is then presented to a trainee. We do not wear worldly finery.



The venerable monk Upali asked the World-honored One, “O World-honored One of Great Virtue, how many panels does a sanghati robe have?”¹⁷

The Buddha responded, “There are nine types. And what are these nine? They are referred to as nine-paneled, eleven-paneled, thirteen-paneled, fifteen-paneled, seventeen-paneled, nineteen-paneled, twenty-one-paneled, twenty-three-paneled, and twenty-five-paneled robes. The first three of these large monastic robes have two long segments and one short segment in each panel, and we should keep to this style. The panels of the next three types have three long segments and one short segment, whereas the final three have four long segments and one short segment. Any panel that has more segments than these would be one whose tears have been repaired.”

Upali once again addressed the World-honored One, saying, “O World-honored One of Great Virtue, how many sizes of sanghati robes are there?”

The Buddha replied, “There are three, namely, large, medium, and small. A large one is three hasta long and five hasta wide.¹⁸ A small one is two and a half hasta long by four and a half hasta wide. Anything between these two is called ‘medium.’”

Upali then addressed the World-honored One, saying, “O World-honored One of Great Virtue, how many panels does an uttarasangha robe have?”

The Buddha replied, “It has just seven panels, with each having two long segments and one short segment.”

17. These are the large robes Dōgen spoke of earlier. The meaning of the Sanskrit term sanghati, as well as other similar technical names for robes, is explained later in the text.

18. A hasta is an Indian measure of variable length. One hasta is the distance from the intended wearer’s elbow to the tip of his or her fist or index finger, generally ranging between sixteen and twenty inches.

Upali then addressed the World-honored One, saying, “O World-honored One of Great Virtue, how many sizes does this seven-paneled robe have?”

The Buddha replied, “It has three, namely, large, medium, and small. A large one is three by five hasta, and a small one is a half hasta shorter on each side. ‘Medium’ refers to anything between these two.”

Upali then addressed the World-honored One, saying, “O World-honored One of Great Virtue, how many panels does an antarvasa robe have?”

The Buddha replied, “It has five panels, each composed of one long and one short segment.”

Upali again addressed the World-honored One, saying, “How many sizes does an antarvasa robe have?”

The Buddha replied, “There are three, namely, large, medium, and small. A large one is three by five hasta, with a medium and a small being the same as before, that is, reduced up to a half hasta on each side.”

The Buddha added, “The antarvasa robe has two additional types. And what are these two? The first is two hasta long and five hasta wide. The second is two hasta long and four hasta wide.”

The term ‘sanghati’ translates as ‘double-layered robe’. The term ‘uttarasangha’ translates as ‘uppermost robe’. The term ‘antarvasa’ translates as ‘innermost robe’, and is also called ‘the lower robe’. It is also said that the sanghati robe is called ‘the large robe’, or ‘the robe for entering royal palaces’, or ‘the robe for giving Teaching’. The uttarasangha robe is referred to as ‘the seven-paneled robe’, or ‘the middle robe’, as well as ‘the robe for entering amongst the assembly’. The antarvasa robe is called ‘the five-paneled robe’, or ‘the small robe’, as well as ‘the robe for going about on one’s daily paths’, and ‘the robe for carrying out one’s temple duties’.

We should safeguard and protect these three robes. Further, among the sanghati robes there is a sixty-paneled kesa that we also must not fail to accept and hold to.



It is generally held that the measurements of a body depend on the span of a lifetime, ranging from eighty thousand years down to a hundred years. Some say that ‘eighty thousand years’ and ‘one hundred years’ are different; others say that they are equal. Between these two views, the one which says that they must be

equal corresponds to the genuine Transmission. The dimensions of a Buddha's Body and that of a human are far distant: a human body can be measured, but ultimately a Buddha's Body is beyond measure. This is why, the moment a Shakyamuni Buddha of the present dons the kesa of Kashō Buddha, it will be something that is neither long nor wide. The moment the Tathagata Maitreya* dons the kesa of a present Shakyamuni Buddha, it will be something that is neither short nor narrow. We must clearly perceive, unequivocally resolve, fully comprehend, and infer in detail the principle of a Buddha's Body being something that is neither tall nor short. Lord Brahma resides high in the world of form, yet he does not see the crown of the Buddha's head. Moggallana may have reached all the way to the distant World Whose Banner Signpost Is the Bright Light, yet he has not thoroughly investigated what the Buddha has voiced. It is truly beyond our minds to imagine or grasp that the form and voice of Buddha are one and the same, whether seen or heard from near or far. All the spiritual merits of the Tathagata are like this, so we should humbly keep these merits in mind.



When it comes to cutting out and sewing a kesa, there is the separate piece robe, the pleated robe, the gathered robe, and the plain robe.¹⁹ All of these are proper methods of construction. We should accept and keep to those robes that we have.



The Buddha once said, "The kesa of Buddhas in any of the three temporal worlds is invariably backstitched."²⁰



In obtaining material for these robes, again, we consider what is immaculate to be best. We consider the robe of waste material to be the most immaculate. All the Buddhas in all the three temporal worlds, without exception, consider this

19. The separate piece robe consists of trimmed pieces of cloth (segments) sewn into vertical panels, which are then joined together and bounded by strips of the base cloth. The pleated robe is made from an uncut piece of base cloth folded in vertical pleats and then sewed to form the appearance of panels. The gathered robe is made from an uncut piece of base cloth folded in vertical pleats, between which panels made of separate segments of cloth are then sewed together. The plain robe is a hemmed piece of uncut cloth.

20. A form of hand sewing in which one first sews one stitch backward on the front side of the fabric, and then sews one stitch forward of double length on the reverse side to form a solid line of stitching on both sides.

material to be immaculate. In addition, a robe given as an alms offering by one with a trusting heart is also immaculate. And one purchased in the marketplace with untainted money is also immaculate. Even though the time within which a robe is to be made has been set by tradition, we are now in the decadent final days of the Teaching, living in a region remote from the original source, so in our accepting and keeping to the kesa, it would probably be best for us to do our cutting and sewing when we have aroused our trusting heart.



The best key to understanding the Greater Course is that the laity—whether commoners or those in lofty positions—also accept and keep to the kesa. Both Lord Brahma and Lord Shakra have now accepted and keep to the kesa, and they are excellent models in the worlds of sensual desire and form. And among humans, the number of excellent examples cannot be calculated. Lay bodhisattvas have all accepted and keep to it.

In China, both Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty and Emperor Yang of the Sui dynasty accepted and kept to the kesa. Both Emperor T'ai-tsung and Emperor Su-tsung of the T'ang dynasty wore the kesa, trained and studied amidst the monastic family, and accepted and kept to the Bodhisattva Precepts.²¹ Other folks—such as lay disciples and their wives—who have accepted the kesa and taken the Precepts have been excellent models in both the past and the present.

In Japan, Crown Prince Shōtoku accepted and kept to the kesa, and, whilst giving Dharma talks on various Scriptures, such as the *Lotus Scripture* and the *Scripture on the Lion's Roar of Queen Shrimala*, he experienced the auspicious sign of jeweled flowers raining down from the heavens. After that, the Buddha Dharma spread throughout our country. Although the prince is regarded as the nation's imperial regent, he was, in fact, a spiritual guide and teacher for commoners as well as for those in lofty positions. As an emissary of the Buddha, he was a father and a mother to sentient beings. In our country today, even though the materials, colors, and measurements of kesas have been misunderstood and have become corrupted, that we have even heard the word 'kesa' is due simply to the influence of Crown Prince Shōtoku. How sad it would be today if he had not shattered what was false and set up what is genuine during his time. Later, Emperor

21. At that time in China, it was usual for the laity to take only the first five of the Ten Great Precepts. To take the Bodhisattva Precepts is to take all ten of these Great Precepts, as well as the forty-eight Less Grave Precepts. These Precepts can be found in the *Scripture of Brahma's Net*. One translation of this appears in *Buddhist Writings on Meditation and Daily Practice* (Shasta Abbey Press, 1994), pp. 55-188

Shōmu likewise accepted and kept to the kesa, and he also took the Bodhisattva Precepts as well. Therefore, whether we are of imperial rank, or whether we are ministers or subjects, we should not delay in accepting and keeping to the kesa, as well as in taking the Bodhisattva Precepts. There can be no greater joy and good fortune for any being in human form.



Someone once said, “The kesa that a lay person accepts and keeps to is called either ‘a single-stitched robe’ or ‘a secular garment’.²² That is, the backstitch was not yet used in sewing one.” It has also been said, “When laity pay a visit to a training hall, they need to bring with them the three Dharma robes, a willow twig toothpick, water for rinsing the mouth, food utensils, and a meditation mat. They should train and practice in precisely the same pure manner as monks do.”

Such is the legacy of some ancient worthy. However, what is now passed on directly by the Buddhas and Ancestors is that kesas are all backstitched, whether conferred on rulers, ministers of state, lay disciples, or ordinary folk. A good example of this is the Sixth Chinese Ancestor Enō who had already received the genuine Transmission of the Buddha’s kesa while he was still the temple servant known as Lu.



Speaking in general, the kesa is the badge and banner of a Buddhist disciple. If we have completely accepted and are keeping to the kesa, then every day we should humbly raise it above our heads. Then, with it placed upon the crown of our head and with our hands in gasshō, we should recite the following verse:

*How great and wondrous is the robe of enlightenment,
Formless and embracing every treasure!
I wish to unfold the Buddha’s Teaching
That I may help all sentient beings reach the Other
Shore.*

After this recitation, we then put on the kesa. While robed in the kesa, we should think of it as our teacher and look upon it as a stupa.* We also recite this verse when we place it on our head after having laundered it.

22. Single stitching consists of alternating stitches of the same length, one on the front of the fabric and one on the back.



The Buddha said, “When you shave your head and don the kesa, you receive the protection of all the Buddhas. When any of you leave home behind, both the lofty and the humble will make venerative offerings to sustain you.” Be clear in your thinking: once you have shaved your head and put on a kesa, you will be aided and protected by each and every single Buddha. By relying on the help and protection of all these Buddhas, you will be able to experience the spiritual merits of Supreme Wisdom. Both the assemblies of lofty beings and the masses of commoners will make offerings to sustain such a one as you.



The World-honored One, in advising the monk Jnanaprabha (‘He Whose Wise Discernment is Radiant’), spoke thus:

The Dharma robe, based on its material, color, and dimensions, acquires ten superb benefits.

First, because it blankets your body well, it keeps feelings of shame or embarrassment at bay and shields you with a sense of modesty, so that you may train with the good Dharma and put It into practice.

Second, because it keeps off heat and cold, as well as mosquitoes, vicious creatures, and poisonous insects, you can train in the Way with a feeling of peace and tranquility.

Third, it makes manifest the look of one who has left home to be a monk, so that those who see you will feel delight and stay far away from evil thoughts and feelings.

Fourth, the kesa has the appearance of a veritable jeweled banner to persons of both ordinary and lofty positions, and those who honor and esteem it will be able to be reborn in Brahma’s heavenly world.

Fifth, when we wear a kesa, it gives rise to thoughts of a precious banner which can extinguish whatever is bedeviling sentient beings and can produce all manner of happiness and virtue.

Sixth, right from the beginning, when we construct a kesa we should dye it with a loaded color, thereby avoiding thoughts of greed engendered by the five senses, and without arousing feelings of covetousness or lust.

Seventh, the kesa is the immaculate robe of the Buddha, which permanently cuts off defiling passions because it transforms them into fertile fields for good.

Eighth, when you put a kesa on your body, it wears away the karma from your defiling acts and, moment by moment, promotes your treading the path of good deeds by keeping to the Ten Precepts.

Ninth, the kesa also resembles a fertile field because it promotes the good and virtuous Bodhisattva Way.

Tenth, the kesa also resembles armor because it is able to protect you from being harmed by the poisonous arrows of defiling passions.

O Jnanaprabha, you surely realize that whenever Buddhas, as well as pratyekabuddhas, shravakas, and immaculate monks, put the kesa upon their body, as a result of the causal effects of these ten benefits, these three holy types alike will sit upon the precious platform of liberation.²³ Wielding the Sword of Wisdom, they will defeat the demons of defiling passion, and these holy types, together as equals, will enter the various realms of nirvana.

The World-honored One, then wishing to express this in verse, said:

*O My monk Jnanaprabha, listen well to what I say,
The robe that is so vast a field of blessings has profits
ten.
Worldly clothing increases the taint of desire,
But not so the Tathagata's Dharma attire.
The clothes of Dharma hinder well the shame and blush
of those with worldly minds,
Filling all with modest thoughts that bring to fruit the
fertile fields of happiness.
Cold, and heat, and insect's poisonous sting it keeps at
bay,
And firms the heart that seeks the Way, till to the Ultimate
you come.
Making clear your leaving home, it parts you from your
greeds and lusts,*

23. The three holy types are Buddhas, lay trainees, and monks.

*And severs you from the false views five, that you may
 train and practice in the proper way.²⁴
 The kesa is as a precious flag whose sight inspires
 respect;
 Whoever humbly bows to it will gain Lord Brahma's
 joyful gifts.
 When, as the Buddha's child, you spread your kesa wide,
 bow as before a stupa you would bow,
 For then will such joy arise that all defiling thoughts will
 disappear, making the hearts of the lofty and the
 common to be moved.
 When you refrain from putting on proud airs and come to
 deep respect, you are a monk in truth,
 And all you do will become free of worldly dust and
 cares.
 All Buddhas praise the kesa as a good and fertile field,
 As unsurpassed in profit and delight for sentient beings
 all.
 Wondrous beyond belief are the kesa's powers and
 strengths;
 It helps you to train so that your actions plant the Bodhi
 seeds.
 Their sproutings of the Truth will be as seedlings in the
 spring,
 Their wondrous fulfilling of enlightenment like autumn's
 fruits.
 Truly is the kesa a suit of armor, diamond hard,
 Impregnable against the harm from passion's poisoned
 darts.
 So brief have I now praised these profits ten;
 Had I all eons to expound them, never could I exhaust
 what they enfold.
 Were a dragon to wrap about his body but a single kesa
 thread,*

24. The five false views are: 1) attachment to self or other, 2) belief in the existence of a self, whether eternal or not, 3) denial of cause and effect, 4) to hold that the preceding three views constitute the Truth, 5) belief that only strict adherence to the Precepts leads to enlightenment.

*Then from a lordly garuda's feasting could he escape.
 Should some human whilst crossing the open sea but hold
 this robe,
 He need have no fear of woe from monstrous fish or any
 hungering thing.
 Though thunder roar and through an angry sky the
 lightning flash,
 The one who wears a kesa need have no fear.
 Should a layman, clothed in white, hold this robe aloft,
 All wicked, hungering beings will never dare draw nigh.
 Should such a one arouse the will to train and seek to
 leave domestic life behind
 So that, now wearied of all worldly things, he may pursue
 the Buddha's Way,
 All devilish mansions everywhere will tremble and quake,
 As this person, arrow swift, comes to truly know the Body
 of the Dharma Lord.*

These ten superb benefits have broadly encompassed all the spiritual merits of the Buddha's Way. It would be good for you to explicitly explore and apply all the merits and virtues described in these sentences and verses. Do not scan them and then hastily put them aside, but look at each and every line and consider its import at length. These superb benefits are simply what the spiritual merits of the kesa are; they are not strengths arising from some trainee's lengthy and fierce pursuit of spiritual benefits.

The Buddha said, "The spiritual strengths of the kesa are beyond all imaginings and conceptions." So, any attempt by ordinary persons, as well as by the wise or saintly, to understand these benefits by conjecture will be in vain. In more general terms, immediately upon our realizing the Body of the Dharma Lord, we will indeed be wearing the Kesa. There has never been anyone from ancient times onwards who realized the Body of the Dharma Lord and was not wrapped in the Kesa.



The most immaculate material for a robe is waste cloth. Its spiritual merits are evident throughout the three divisions of the canon—the Scriptural Discourses, the monastic regulations, and the commentaries—of both the Greater and the Lesser Courses, so we would do well to make inquiries of those who have explored them extensively. We also need to clarify in detail what other materials may be used for making a robe. This is something that Buddha after Buddha and Ancestor

after Ancestor have made abundantly clear and have correctly Transmitted to us, and They are persons unsurpassed by any others.

In the *Middle Āgama Scripture*, the Buddha said:

O all you discerning ones, let us suppose that there is someone whose physical behavior is unstained, but whose manner of speaking and intentions are tainted. If an astute person should see this, and then feel any hostility arising, this feeling must, by all means, be dispelled. O all you discerning ones, let us further suppose that there is someone whose bodily actions are tainted, but whose speech and intentions are unstained. If an astute person should see this and then feel any hostility arising, this feeling too must, by all means, be dispelled. And just how should such a one dispel this feeling?

O you discerning ones, such a person should be like the hermit monk living in a forest who gathers up pieces of waste cloth. He discards from this waste material whatever part he sees is shabby, or soiled with excrement, or stained with urine, nasal mucus, or any other unclean substance. After he has spotted such a cloth, he picks it up with his left hand and stretches it out with his right. If there are any parts free from stain of excrement, urine, mucus, or any other unclean substance, or any part not riddled with holes, he then tears that part off and takes it.

In like manner, O you discerning ones, if there is someone whose bodily actions are stained while his speech is untainted, do not think about that person's tainted bodily behavior. Simply keep in mind the purity of his speech. If astute people feel hostility arising at what they see, by all means they should dispel it in this manner.

This is the method by which hermit monks of the forest handled waste cloth.



There are four kinds and ten types of waste cloth. When gathering waste cloth, first, take those parts that have no holes. Next, reject those parts too deeply or too long stained by feces or urine so that they cannot be washed clean. You may take those parts that are washable.

The Ten Types of Waste Cloth

First, cloth chewed by an ox.

Second, cloth gnawed by rats.

Third, cloth singed by fire.

Fourth, menstrual cloth.

Fifth, cloth discarded from childbirthing.

Sixth, cloth abandoned at a wayside shrine for birds to peck apart.

Seventh, cloth from a dead person's clothing abandoned at a grave site.

Eighth, cloth from abandoned prayer flags.

Ninth, cloth from robes discarded by officials upon their advancement to higher rank.

Tenth, burial shrouds discarded by those returning from a funeral.

These ten types of cloth are what people discard; they are not something that people in general make further use of. We pick these up and make them into the immaculate material of a kesa. They are what all Buddhas at all times have sung the praises of and have come to make use of. This waste cloth robe is therefore what the ordinary and the lofty, as well as dragons and other such beings, hold in great esteem, protect, and defend. Gather these pieces of cloth and make them into a kesa, for they are indeed the foremost of pure materials: they are the foremost in immaculacy.

In Japan today, such waste cloth robes do not exist. Though you may try to seek them out, you will be unable to come across them. How sad that our country is so small and remote! Instead, we need to use the clean materials that donors have given us as alms-cloth. Or, we may make into kesas some cloth bought in the marketplace by persons whose money comes from an untainted livelihood. Such waste material as this, as well as what has been earned through an untainted livelihood, is, indeed, neither silk nor cotton, neither gold nor silver cloth studded with pearls or jade, nor patterned cloth or silk gauze that is brocaded or embroidered: it is simply waste cloth. This waste material is not for the sake of humble dress, nor for the sake of beautiful raiment: it is simply for the sake of the Buddha Dharma. Using it for clothing is precisely the genuine Transmission of the Skin and Flesh, Bones and Marrow of all Buddhas at all times. It is the genuine Transmission of the Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching. Moreover, we should not ask commoners or lofty ones about the virtues of this, but should learn of them through training with the Buddhas and Ancestors.



Whilst I was in Sung China doing my training on the long bench in the Meditation Hall, I noticed that every morning following the striking of the wake-up

block, the monks who sat on either side of me would raise their folded kesa in a gesture of offering, place it atop their head, respectfully make gasshō, and recite a verse to themselves. What they were saying in that verse was:

*How great and wondrous is the robe of enlightenment,
Formless and embracing every treasure!
I wish to unfold the Buddha's Teaching
That I may help all sentient beings reach the Other
Shore.*

On the occasion when I learned of this, a feeling I had never experienced before welled up in me. A joy filled my body to overflowing; tears of gratitude, stealing from my eyes, rolled down my cheeks and wet the collar of my robe. The reason for this was that I had been reading the *Āgama Scriptures* shortly before, and though I had seen the passage on humbly offering up the kesa above one's head, I was not clear about the ceremonial procedure. Now I was personally witnessing it and was filled with such joy and worshipful admiration at being able to see manifest before me its deeper intent. When I was in my native land, there had been no teacher to instruct me in this, nor any good spiritual companion. How could I not regret the days and years I had so vainly spent or not grieve their passing? But upon seeing and hearing what was now before me, I was able to rejoice because of some good deed done in a past life. If I had vacantly remained in my homeland, how could I possibly have sat shoulder-to-shoulder with these Treasures of the Sangha who had received and actually donned the kesa of a Buddha! My joy and sorrow were not unmixed, as my myriad tears issued forth.

Then, in silence, I took a vow: no matter how, be I ever so incompetent, I will become an inheritor of the Buddha Dharma, I will correctly Transmit the True Teaching, and, out of pity for the sentient beings in my homeland, I will help them see and hear the Teaching concerning the robe that the Buddhas and Ancestors have genuinely Transmitted. The vow that I took then has now proved not to be in vain. The lay and monastic bodhisattvas who have accepted and keep to the kesa are many, for which I rejoice. These companions who have accepted and keep to the kesa, without fail, humbly raise their kesa above their head each morning and evening, since the spiritual merits of this will be unsurpassed. The practice of reading or listening to a single line from Scripture or the whole of this kesa verse was prevalent everywhere throughout all the highways and byways of China, and was as common as trees and stones. And even if the spiritual merits from the genuine Transmission of the kesa were encountered for only a scant day and night, they would still be pre-eminent and unsurpassed.



In Great Sung China during the tenth lunar month of the seventeenth year of the Chia-ting era (November 1223), two Korean monks came to Ch'ing-yüen Prefecture. One was called in Chinese Chi-hsüen, and the other was called Ching-yün. These two incessantly talked about the meaning of Buddhist Scriptures, for they were scholarly men of letters, and, though they were also monks, they had neither kesa nor alms bowl and resembled those who wander through life in ignorance. Sad to say, they had the superficial form of monks but lacked the Dharma of monks. This may have been due simply to their being from a small, remote nation. When those from Japan who have the superficial form of monks travel to other countries, they too resemble those like Chi-hsüen.



Shakyamuni Buddha, before His enlightenment, humbly raised the kesa above His head, never ignoring it for some twelve years. You are already His distant descendants, so train well with this practice. Turn away from bowing to celestial beings, spirits, rulers or their ministers, since all such acts are done in the vain pursuit of fame and gain. Instead, offer them the spiritual merit from your humbly raising the Buddha's kesa above your head, for that will be joy indeed!

Given to the assembly at Kannondōri in Kōshōhōrin-ji Temple on the first day of winter in the first year of the Ninji era (October 17, 1240).