

The Buddhist Kesa: Clothes of Enlightenment

This article is dedicated to Rev. Master Jiyu, who taught us these things and embodied them all. I wished to gather in one place all the teaching she gave us on the kesa, together with additional supporting information gleaned over the years from other sources. Although I endeavored to be as accurate as possible, the article is not meant to be definitive. I welcome corrections, clarifications, and additions, and the responsibility for any errors, oversights, or confusion is mine

I wish to thank my many fellow senior monks who read this article at various points, each of whom offered additional teaching, clarification, and invaluable suggestions. A special thanks goes to Rev. Master Daizui MacPhillamy and Rev. Master Koten Benson for their extensive consultation and discussion, and to Rev. Mildred Laeser, who urged me to complete it. I began this writing while Rev. Master Jiyu was still alive, so in some places I have retained the use of "Ab-bess" rather than changing all the references to "Abbot."

*

*How great and wondrous are the clothes of enlightenment,
Formless and embracing every treasure.
I wish to unfold the Buddha's Teaching
That I may help all living things.¹*

The Buddhist kesa, or meditation robe, is a form in training that points to the Formless, the Unborn, which embraces all things. Both monks and laity, male and female, of all traditions wear some form of it. The style and the color may vary, but the general appearance and meaning remain the same. It is a symbol of being a disciple of the Buddha. Sometimes referred to as the "banner of the arahants" or the "garment of liberation," the kesa represents the Precepts and the Buddha Nature.

Design of the Kesa

The monk's **full kesa** (Sanskrit, *kasaya*), worn for meditation and ceremonies, is modeled on the robe worn by the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni. It is a simple one-piece garment modestly covering most of the body and is draped over the left shoulder, resembling a Roman toga. The robe originally was composed of scraps of fabric cut out from easily available, unwanted sources such as discarded rags and shrouds. The pieces were carefully washed and dyed, then sewn together in a patchwork fashion. This kind of robe distinguished the Buddha's followers from other religious of his day, especially the naked ascetics.² Later the robe was made from fabric presented by lay devotees, and twenty years into his ministry the Buddha stylized the patchwork pattern in the monastic rules:

Once too when the Blessed One was on His way home from Rajagaha to the Southern hills, He said to the venerable Ananda [his disciple attendant or chaplain]:

‘Ananda, do you see the land of Magadha laid out in squares, laid out in strips, laid out with borders, laid out with cross-lines?’

‘Yes, Lord.’

‘Try to arrange robes for bhikkhus [monks] like that, Ananda.’

*(Vinaya Mahavagga Khandaka 8)*³

The pattern of the rice fields woven into the monks’ very clothing reminded them of their interdependence with the laity – the faithful and devoted donors who provided the monks on their alms round with daily fare from their fields. One term for the kesa that reflects this connection is “the robe that is a fertile field of blessings.”

The full or formal kesa worn by monks of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives retains several **elements of the original Buddhist robe**. First, when extended our kesa is the same **simple rectangular garment** composed of small pieces of fabric **sewn together patchwork fashion** in a particular pattern reminiscent to that requested by the Buddha: one can see clearly the strips, squares, borders, and cross-lines mentioned above. Although today we no longer usually gather the pieces from different sources, the method of construction reflects the original intent. The laity, in keeping with the spirit of early Indian practice, also provides the fabric or funds to purchase it.

Second, we still wear the formal kesa **over the left shoulder**, with the right shoulder uncovered. The original kesa was draped and wrapped around the left shoulder and arm, as present-day Theravada bhikkhus (monks) and bhikkunis (nuns) do. In Japanese Soto Zen, the kesa was tied with rope or cord. Monks of our Order use a kesa clip and ring, a practical solution adopted from our Chinese Dharma relatives in Malaysia and used commonly by Rinzaï Zen monastics. As Rev. Master Jiyu taught us, the kesa clip symbolizes the hook with which the Bodhisattva fishes sentient beings out of the sea of samsara (endless cycle of birth-and-death), and the ring, like a life buoy, represents the faith and willingness with which we are rescued and saved – our part in the training endeavor.

Third, most of our kesas maintain a feature common to the early kesa in that each corner contains a **cloth square** representing one of the **four heavenly monarchs**. These celestial lords – one in each cardinal direction – were converted from their role in the Indian pantheon of deities and became guardians of the Dharma. The use of these squares may be seen, for example, in ancient Thai Buddhist temple paintings that portray the life of the Buddha. In our tradition the Four Kings also appear at the corners of a monk’s bowing mat, as well as in the corners of the small kesa or *rakusu*, a smaller version of the kesa worn outside the meditation hall and by lay ministers as well. The

Four Kings appear most visibly on the postulant's small kesa, where the squares are white fabric sewn against the black background of a novice's rakusu. The white squares are removed at ordination, signifying the "activation" of the Monarchs in protection of the new monastic trainee.

A garment of this composition colored a shade of yellowish-brown came to be worn exclusively by Shakyamuni's male monastic disciples. The female monastics wore a similar garment of darker brown fabric. Thus the kesa became a recognizable feature – and symbol – of the Buddha's sangha.

Colors of the Kesa

The **color of the first kesas** was a dull yellowish-brown, achieved by dyeing the cloth using roots, bark, flowers, and twigs, particularly that of the jackfruit tree. The color, as well as the patchwork composition mentioned above, was intended to decrease the value of the cloth. The kesa represented the renunciation of the householder life, which for wealthy Indian nobility like Shakyamuni and His relatives, was quite dramatic. The color and construction deterred theft and use for other purposes.

The various **colors of kesas in our Order** serve several functions. Primarily, for the person wearing it, the color is a visible and tactile close reminder of the path and level of training – householder or monastic – that each aspires to show and maintain. The various colors develop and promote harmony in the sangha in the following ways:

First, each color represents not only the **path or level of training**, but also the **corresponding responsibilities** of that path or level. For instance, only the senior monks, who are responsible for leadership and teaching in the Order, wear purple vestments. Knowing this enables one to respond quickly to instructions from, and address serious religious questions about the Dharma to, the senior monks.

Second, the use of differently-colored vestments to indicate level of training naturally lends itself to **the practice of bowing and showing respect** to others, an essential practice in any community. The colors facilitate being mindful and expressing gratitude and recognition of Buddha Nature due other members of the sangha, especially our seniors and teachers. This provision is particularly valuable in regard to monastics, where secular clues to one's "place in the scheme of things" – hair style, clothing, fashions, jewelry, etc. – have been relinquished, ideally along with habits and tendencies that could indicate one's former background, class, or status. "Rank" in the sangha is based on ordination order and spiritual understanding, regardless of social class, wealth, gender, race, nationality, age, sexual orientation, education, mental astuteness, health, etc. Although this system may sound authoritarian and hierarchical to our modern ears, it was revolutionary in the Buddha's day because it provided an egalitarian seniority system based on a determinant other than caste. Also, the Vinaya and later

monastic regulations emphasize that both junior and senior members show compassion and respect for each other and relate in a more “horizontal” and “familial” manner when appropriate.

Monks receive their first full kesa at novice ordination. These new monks wear **black**, the color of all-acceptance, and as novices they are sometimes referred to as “priest-trainees.” According to Rev. Master Jiyu, in ancient times this color was more a shimmering blue-black, like that of the feathers of a raven or a crow. Within the blackness may be seen all the colors of the rainbow; within the darkness of karma and suffering dwells the potentiality of Buddha Nature. After several years, when a novice assists the abess for a term as head novice and oversees all junior monks in the meditation hall, he or she sews a white stripe over the collar of the kesa. This symbolizes that the novice has begun to see the “All is One” within the “All is Different,” the white within the black, which is a step deeper in training and understanding.

When a novice is Transmitted, again usually after several more years, they are given a kesa of the **yellowish-brown color** called *mokuran* in Japanese, the “color of silence.” These monks have gone, or at least seen, beyond the opposites of black and white (the color of the head novice’s kesa) and touched the “third position,” the stillness (silence) of the Unborn.

This yellow-brown kesa ideally is the **color of the original kesa** worn by the Buddha and early sangha and still worn by contemporary monks of the Theravada tradition. Depending on availability of fabric, in our Order this shade of kesa tends to range from dark gold or yellow to tan. The mokuran color represents the process of the novice monk becoming like – taking on the form of, wearing the kesa of – Shakyamuni Buddha. One way to look at it is that although already a “monk,” he or she now becomes a “priest,” fully committed to the practice and the continuance of the lineage. In this way, Transmission in our Soto Zen tradition is analogous to receiving the complete bhikshu or bhikshuni vinaya precepts: one moves from novitiate or “priest-trainee” (*shramanera* or *shramanerika*) to full “priest” (bhikshu or bhikshuni). My understanding is that Buddhist Transmission is also the equivalent of final vows for Roman Catholic monks and nuns. In our Order, the newly Transmitted priest undergoes another two to three years of training before teacher certification: he or she learns how to teach and lecture, to perform ceremonies, to serve as a monastery officer, and to run a local temple as a parish priest.

Senior monks in our Order certified by their masters as teachers are permitted to wear **purple kesas**. In a monastery these are the monks in whom the abess entrusts the care of the temple and with whom she shares the teaching and administrative responsibilities. In China and Japan, the emperor bestowed purple kesas on eminent monks in order to recognize spiritual achievement or to express congratulations. (See Rev. Master Jiyu’s explanation of *zuisse* in chapter nine of *Zen is Eternal Life*.⁴) Our Order’s practice is

to retain the deep purple color and bestow it on all senior monks when they have completed their teacher training. This constitutes “graduation” and certification as a “Teacher of Buddhism,” a rank in some Japanese lineages referred to as *sensei*.

When a teacher is named a master, they are given a long intertwined **red tassel** to wear with their kesa. Attached at the kesa clip, it cascades (flows) over the shoulder and down the back. The red color can represent the “blood of the Precepts.” The abbess or abbot of a large training monastery, as well as the Head of the Order, may wear a purple tassel to indicate their position as the “leading teacher” of the community and Order, respectively.

One may also see from time to time **other colors of kesas**, particularly on special occasions such as festival ceremonies at our large monasteries. For instance, the celebrant (priest leading the ceremony) may wear a kesa of gold or purple brocade over a ceremonial formal robe, often purple for the abbess and red for other celebrants. For festival memorials honoring the Buddhist masters who ordained Rev. Master Jiyu in Malaysia – Rev. Seck Kim Seng and Rev. Seck Sian Toh – Rev. Master Jiyu usually wore a red-and-gold kesa over a yellow formal robe, traditional ceremonial colors in Chinese Mahayana Buddhism. These ceremonial kesas usually have twenty-five “stripes” (patterns of fabric strips) in order to indicate the function and position of the priest wearing it: only an abbot would wear these kesas.

These **elaborate kesas and formal robes** often belong to the monastery or temple and are handed down from one abbot to the next or from a master to her disciples. They are sometimes beautifully embroidered. Worn only for public ceremonies attended by the laity, they are teaching aids (skillful means) used to inspire faith and devotion. This custom is common to our Serene Reflection (Soto Zen) tradition, as is noted in the biography of Shunryu Suzuki-roshi, *Crooked Cucumber*. Suzuki-roshi’s master once took him to task for not wearing his special decorative robes when conducting a funeral ceremony for a lay patron. The family of the deceased was very upset. They felt short-changed on the ceremony and that their relative had not been not been afforded the proper respect.

Rev. Master Jiyu taught us the **use of such beautiful things, but only in the service of the Unborn**. Rev. Master constantly pointed to the quality of the training of the person wearing the kesa. Rev. Master Eko, at the time Vice-Abbot of Shasta Abbey, once related an anecdote illustrating this point when I was his ceremonial chaplain and assisting him with the beautiful, ornate robes and kesa as he filled in for Rev. Master Jiyu as celebrant in her absence. He related how Rev. Master Jiyu had once quipped to him while he was helping her prepare for a similar ceremony, “Even a monkey looks good in gold brocade!” I understood his, and her, point to be that anyone, even a monkey, when dressed up in fancy clothes can win the admiration of others. The robes do not make the monk.

One other kesa coming to be seen with more frequency in our Order, at least in North America, is the **mokuran or dark brown kesa and rakusu** worn by senior priests whose duties require frequent contact with the public outside the large training monasteries: Head of the Order, abbots, lay ministry advisor, priors, monks on alms rounds, traveling priests, etc. In such circumstances sometimes the purple color does not seem appropriate, particularly because in the eyes of other Soto Zen Buddhists we might seem to be giving the impression that we had received the Japanese imperial “*Zuisse*” kesa mentioned above. The dark brown color is also used in Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese monastic robes. In the eyes of Chinese Buddhism, the parent of other East Asian Buddhist traditions, brown in any of its various shades – ranging from cream and yellow through saffron, gold, ochre, orange, tan, to dark brown, and including even salmon and pink – is mokuran.

The use of the mokuran (or brown) kesa also points to the simple, ordinary “**universal color**” kesa worn by the early monastic sangha, as mentioned above. For this reason an abbot wears a mokuran kesa during the Ten Precepts Retreat’s “Ceremony of Following Where the Precepts, as the Blood of the Buddhas, Lead” (J. *Ketchimyaku*). In the ceremony the abbess or abbot, representing Shakyamuni Buddha as a simple ordinary monk, leads all trainees around the monastery walking the pattern of the Bloodline graph, thus showing how to keep the Precepts in the twists and turns of everyday life. When the procession reaches the Buddha Hall, the abbot literally becomes “the Buddha” on the altar, from whom all the new lay ordinands receive their bloodline certificates.

There are still yet other kesas and formal robes of varying colors and combinations which you may have seen occasionally at very special ceremonies, such as the abbatial funeral ceremonies for Rev. Master Jiyu and Rev. Master Daizui. The kesas and robes described here are the ones most commonly worn at the temples of our Order. Before examining other forms of the kesa, let us look briefly at other monastic attire.

The “Three Robes” and Other Vestments

In a hot, humid climate like India, Buddhist (male) monks usually wore only the kesa plus two simple garments underneath. These are the “three robes” allowed each monk by the Vinaya. (Female monks, or nuns, had an additional two robes—a vest/bodice and a bathing cloth.⁵) We learned as novices at Shasta Abbey that as Buddhism moved into other climates and cultures, the practice was to keep the kesa the topmost garment and alter the other garments to accord with new customs and climates. Thus, in colder climates it was necessary to add more clothing underneath the kesa to ensure the health of the monks. As it was related to me, according to monks of

various traditions at a monastic conference at Shasta Abbey in 1997, our **formal robe** (Japanese: *koromo*) probably evolved through stitching together the two simple Indian under-garments to make a single garment consisting of bodice/jacket and skirt.⁶ This explanation is also given in *Hokyo-ki*,⁷ Dogen's journal from the years of his study under Tendo Nyojo in 13th century China. The long sleeves could have evolved by stitching the two edges of the jacket/second robe together to form the large "bag" sleeves that are characteristic of the *koromo*. The long sleeves also served in Chinese culture to satisfy a sense of modesty and respect by covering as much of the body as possible, and perhaps to provide more protection from the colder climate.⁸ In India, south Asia, and the Himalayas, the "three robes" remained separate as skirt, jacket, and *sanghati/kesa*. In those cultures, sleeves were considered worldly, so the jacket simply covered the trunk of the body.

Only in China and Japan did the "three robes" become "three kesas." Great Master Dogen names these three types – five, seven, and nine stripe – in his chapter "*Kesa kudoku*" [The Merit of Wearing the Kesa]⁹ in his masterwork *Shobogenzo*. He writes that the five-stripe *kesa* (*gojo-e*) is also known as the under *kesa*. The five-striped *kesa* corresponds to the smallest of the three robes allowed by the Buddha, the *antaravasaka*, used as underclothing.¹⁰ It was originally a skirt in five panels or "stripes"; it seems that the "paddy-field" pattern was lost about the time monks began attaching the skirt to the jacket.¹¹ Dogen writes that the five-striped *kesa* (our *rakusu* – see below) is to be worn "for daily use, *samu* [working meditation], and when alone in our rooms."¹² The seven-stripe *kesa*, *shichijo-e*, is also known as the *uttaraso* and is worn "when training with other monks or when participating in a ceremony." This robe lacks a lining and is worn as a toga, *uttarasanga*; the Buddha allowed it for moderate weather; it could be worn under the nine-stripe *kesa*. The nine-stripe *kesa*, *Kujo-e*, according to Dogen, is also known as the large or double *kesa*. Dogen writes that it is to be worn when teaching, whether in a palace or in a householder's modest home. This nine-stripe *kesa*, consisting of two layers of fabric, is the third robe allowed by the Buddha, the *sanghati*; it may be worn as a cloak in cold weather.¹³

As to the **color of these formal robes**, junior monks (novices and Transmitted monks, as well as postulants) wear black; as with the novice's *kesa*, black is the color of all-acceptance, the "key to the gateless gate." Senior monks (teachers and masters) wear brown, a color that Rev. Master Jiyu explained as one that people instinctively trust. As explained above, brown in its various shades has come to be considered a "universal" color for Buddhist monks.

Depending on the temple, the celebrant for daily ceremonies usually wears a formal robe and *kesa*. Sometimes other key participants such as chaplains and precentor do as well. Usually all monks present for funerals, memorials, festivals, or other special days of the monastic or liturgical calendar dress in formal robes and *kesas*. We were taught as novices at Shasta Abbey that the formal robe's present style dates from the

Chinese T'ang Dynasty (618-907 C.E.), when monks of our tradition decided to stop altering the formal robes (that go under the kesa) in order to accord with the fashions of the day. Thus the formal robe now functions as another symbol for the unchanging presence of the Unborn in the midst of phenomenal change.

Formal robes are usually worn over a **white under-robe**, in Japan a kimono type undergarment. In our Order, this robe is made according to the same pattern as the everyday robe (see below). As a person prepares to be ordained as a novice monk, they usually sew the white under-robe themselves to wear for the ordination ceremony. Great Master Dogen refers to this ordination requirement in "*Shukke*" ["Renunciation of the World"], a chapter of the *Shobogenzo*.¹⁴ During the ordination ceremony the Master presents the ordinand with their first formal robe and kesa, which they are assisted to put on over the under-robe (which they are already wearing) as part of the ceremony. The white under-robe represents the purity of the new priest-trainee's heart and intention, the "first mind" or "beginner's mind" referred to in the ordination ceremony and by Dogen and other Zen masters.

The monk's **everyday robe** for daily use in a temple was perhaps a practical modification of the formal robe. In Chinese Buddhism, this robe was called *ch'ang kua*.¹⁵ During meditation, monks always wear a full kesa over this robe. The exception is during the first meditation period of the day when one meditates on the folded kesa in front of one and the commitment to keep to the Precepts that wearing the kesa represents.

Other Forms of the Kesa

To return now to other forms of the kesa: The full kesa monks wear for meditation and ceremonial is not practical for other daily activities such as communal labor, so in the Chinese Ch'an (meditation) tradition, the five-stripe kesa evolved into "hanging robes" (C. *gualo* or *guazi*¹⁶). We call this robe, which hangs around one's neck by several long straps, a **small kesa**, in Japanese **rakusu**.¹⁷ As with the formal kesa, small pieces of fabric are sewn together in a stylized pattern to form a square. Also like the full kesa, the small kesa contains the Four Monarchs in the corners. These are most visible on the postulant's rakusu, as mentioned above. Rather than being connected by a kesa clip and ring, on a small kesa two pieces of one of the neck straps are tied together by a knot around the ring. Rev Master Jiyu once said that these two straps represent heaven and earth and that the ring itself represents the hara, within which through meditation both come together.

The composite square of the small kesa hangs as a halter or bib so that it rests against the lower chest and midriff, covering the hara (spiritual center of the body). The small kesa is the same color as that particular monk's full kesa. The rakusu is embroidered on the neck flap with a stylized mountain that for us represents the particular monastery ("mountain") associated with the lineage. In the Far East, monasteries were

usually located on, and known by, the name of a particular mountain. Our Order's lineage is connected with Mount Shasta, in northern California (U.S.A.), where at Shasta Abbey Rev. Master Jiyu was Abbess. The reverse side of the small kesa (toward the trainee and lined with white fabric) may contain a verse of teaching, often calligraphed especially for the trainee by their Master.

A yet smaller form of the kesa is the **token kesa, or wagesa**. (I have also seen this kesa referred to in Japanese Soto Zen publications as a single-stripe or "circular" kesa.) The wagesa consists of a single strip of fabric tied together with knotted cord and again is worn around the neck. In our Order, the black wagesa is the form of kesa given to lay Buddhists when they formally vow to live by the Precepts at lay ordination. Some monks on occasion may wear a token kesa too, often the color of their rank, when not dressed in monastic attire. Such occasions may be: when traveling or doing outdoor work such as gardening. The wagesa is "token" not in the sense of "tokenism" ("policy of making a merely perfunctory effort or symbolic gesture"), but rather in that it represents the whole, just as a subway token stands for, and is worth the value of, the cash used to purchase it: the token allows you to ride the subway. A kesa, no matter what its size, form, or color, has the same meaning. It represents the Precepts and Buddha Nature and is always treated with especial care and respect.

The Bowing Mat

A final vestment is the **bowing mat**, which drapes over the left wrist when the full kesa is worn. The mat is the same color as the kesa and is the equivalent of the Theravadin bowing cloth and the multi-colored Chinese bowing mat. Having insight into the way human beings tend to take pleasure and invest pride in new clothes, the Buddha in the Vinaya instructed monks when sewing a new mat to add a piece of their old one in order to help them maintain humility. That instruction finds its stylized continuation as the **borders** on our mats. Rev. Master Jiyu once commented that the borders of the mat represent the Buddhas and Ancestors within whose help and protection the trainee sits. A mat also represents the opening of a meditation hall, with sitting places along four sides and open space in the center, as well as the opening of one's heart to teach all beings. This is one reason mats are reserved for use by monastics.

Lay Minister Vestments

Lay ministers in our Order – mature lay trainees who are committed to our lineage's teaching and who serve in some functions of the Order's ministry – also wear kesas and robes of various sorts, distinct in color and style so as to be easily distinguished from the monks' vestments. I have left discussion of these vestments to those who are more knowledgeable than I in this area.

Conclusion

In concluding we may ask, why have all these special clothes and so many detailed symbols for training and practice? Essentially, they are helpful reminders of our aspiration in practice. Religious training is not easy, and we use whatever we can that will assist us in remembering our purpose. As Koho Zenji, Rev. Master Jiyu's Master in Japan taught her, "Use the Truth, the whole Truth, and anything else that works!" This is not an injunction to do whatever we wish. It is an admonition to teachers and masters to not cling to religious forms or dogma but to do whatever is necessary to help others. It is implicit that all such actions have a Preceptual intent. In the area of vestments, the various robes and kesas are simply a way of teaching, skillful means (*upaya*), and like other aspects of training must not be clung to.

The Buddhist kesa helps all of us – monastic and lay – to remember our vow and commitment to live by the Precepts – Buddha Nature – and as renunciate disciples of the Buddha. This renunciation of the world is not limited to the giving up of the household life to be a monk. The successful practice of serene reflection meditation, whether by monastics or laity, depends on the renouncing of the "world" of sensual desire, anger, and delusion. These are the three fires or poisons which fuel the endless cycle of birth and death, the suffering world of samsara. These basic defilements and all their permutations obscure our True Heart, the Unborn Buddha Nature, and are relinquished, purified, and transformed through the practice of meditation. Wearing the clothes of the Buddha – the clothes of enlightenment – helps us remember this lofty goal in the midst of daily life. It also reminds us to not stop short of our goal – full enlightenment, Buddhahood. We are His disciples and aspire to do the same as He. Shakyamuni Buddha continued to wear His kesa and carry His begging bowl after His enlightenment until His death forty-five years later, thus continuing to practice and teach all around Him. We wish to continue our own practice in the spirit of the Bodhisattva vow of saving all beings, no matter how long it takes. Thus we embody what Rev. Master Jiyu so often emphasized – "endless training."

¹ Kesa verse (recited whenever putting on a kesa) from *The Liturgy of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives*, 2nd ed. Comp. Rev. Master P.T.N.H. Jiyu-Kennett (Mount Shasta, California: Shasta Abbey Press, 1990), pp. 57-58. Verse modified slightly since publication in accordance with Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett's instructions.

² Mohan Wijayaratna, Chapter 3: Clothing, in *Buddhist Monastic Life: According to the Texts of the Theravada Tradition*, Trans. Claude Grainger and Steve Collins (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990), pp. 32-55.

³ Bhikkhu Nanamoli, trans. *The Life of the Buddha: According to the Pali Canon* (Kandy, Ceylon: Buddhist Publication Society, 1978), p. 165.

⁴ Roshi P.T.N.H. Jiyu-Kennett, *Zen is Eternal Life* (formerly entitled *Selling Water by the River*), several editions: recent ones published by Shasta Abbey Press in Mount Shasta, California.

⁵ "Monastic Robes" @ www.buddhanet.net/net/e-learning/buddhistworld/robe_text.htm.

⁶ See “Meeting Under the Mountain: An account of a gathering of Western Buddhist Monastics,” Amaro Bhikkhu, in *The Journal of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives*, Volume 12, number 7 (Winter 1997), pp. 79-80.

⁷ Kodera, Takashi James, trans., *Dogen’s Formative Years in China: An Historical Survey and Annotated Translation of the ‘Hokyo-ki’*. (Boulder: Prajna Press, 1980), p. 129. Another translation may be found as “Journal of My Study in China,” in *Enlightenment Unfolds: The Essential Teachings of Zen Master Dogen*, Kazuaki Tanahashi, ed. (Boston: Shambhala, 2000), p. 15.

⁸ Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China: An Annotated Translation and Study of the Chanyuan Qinggui* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai’i Press, 2002), p. 65 and p. 273n. 53.

⁹ Trans. Kosen Nishiyama et al., *Shobogenzo: The Eye and Treasury of the True Law*, Vol. 4, Nakayama Shobo, 1983, pp. 15 and 25-26.

¹⁰ See Wijyaratna, *Buddhist Monastic Life*, p. 36.

¹¹ Amaro Bhikkhu, “Meeting under the Mountain,” p. 80.

¹² Dogen, *Kesa Kudoku*, Nishiyama trans., p. 15.

¹³ For many years ordaining masters in our Order gave the new trainee at novice ordination the five-stripe kesa (rakusu), along with the seven-stripe kesa (for meditation and ceremonies). When asked about a rule regarding the three kesas of varying stripes, Rev. Master Daizui MacPhillamy, former head of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives, said generally he felt that the five- and seven-stripe kesas were for novice monks and the nine-stripe kesa for seniors, but he didn’t want to make a rule codifying it. This usage accords with the use of the three kesas outlined by Dogen: the nine-stripe kesa is reserved for senior monks who would be teaching.

However, the Serene Reflection/Soto Zen ordination ceremony clearly outlines the giving of the three kesas – five-stripe, seven-stripe, and nine-stripe – to a novice monk. Venerable Master Tsung Tsu Shih, a Chinese Mahayana Vinaya instructor in Nantou County, Taiwan, offered a possible clarification to this seeming discrepancy. In Chinese Buddhism, the seven-stripe kesa is worn for meditation and daily ceremonies; the nine-stripe is used for formal ceremonies, teaching, and alms rounds. A footnote in *Dogen’s Extensive Record: A Translation of the ‘Eihei Koroku,’* translated by Taigen Dan Leighton and Shohaku Okumura, edited by Taigen Dan Leighton (Boston: Shambhala, 2004) supports this explanation (see p. 537,n 2). Thus the nine-stripe kesa is used by both senior and novice monks for some activities.

¹⁴ Dogen, “*Shukke*”, trans. Kosen Nishiyama and John Stevens, *Shobogenzo*, Vol. 1, Nakayama Shobo, 1975, p. 136.

¹⁵ See description and photograph on pages 375-376 of J. Prip-Moller’s *Chinese Buddhist Monasteries: Their Plan and its Function as a Setting for Buddhist Monastic Life*, 2nd ed. (Hong Kong University Press, 1967; originally published in Copenhagen, 1937).

¹⁶ Yifa, *ibid.*, p. 65 and p. 273n 56. See photograph on p. xxv *Guazi* “hanging robe.”

*

Additional Readings

In addition to the works cited in the notes, the following may be consulted for additional teaching, information, and perspectives. They are listed in order of relevance to the topic. The last three I came across only as I was completing this article and thus did not incorporate all the information they contained. All three corroborate the teaching presented here, as well as offer additional minor details.

1. Rev. Master Daizui MacPhillamy, *Aspects of the Meaning of the Buddhist Robe, the*

Kesa (Shasta Abbey Dharma Tapes, 1997).

2. Great Master Dogen, "On the Transmission of the Kesa" (*Den'e*) and "On the Spiritual Merits of the Kesa" (*Kesa Kudoku*), translated by Rev. Hubert Nearman, in *Shobogenzo: The Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching* (complete translation), forthcoming from Shasta Abbey Press, 2006.

3. Great Master Dogen, "Kesa-Kudoko: The Merit of the Kasaya" and "Den-e: The Transmission of the Robe" in *Shobogenzo*, Volume 1, trans. Gudo Nishijima & Chodo Cross (Woods Hole, MA, 1977), pp. 119-166. See diagram of kesa on page 287.

4. Thanissaro Bhikkhu (Geoffrey DeGraff), trans., *The Buddhist Monastic Code: The Pratimoksha Training Rules, with explanations*, Volume 1, Chapter 7, section 1: "The Robe-cloth Chapter," (Valley Center, California: Metta Forest Monastery, 1994) pp. 163-206.

5. Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *The Buddhist Monastic Code II: The Khandakha Rules*, Chapter 2: "Cloth Requisites" (Metta Forest Monastery, 2001) pp. 12-30. In particular, note the diagram of the five-stripe kesa on page 16. It bears a clear resemblance to our five-stripe kesa, the rakusu.

6. Tomoe Katagiri, *Study of the Okesa, Nyoho-e, Buddha's Robe*, 3rd edition, Part 1 (Minneapolis: Minnesota Zen Center, 2001), pp. 3-26. This article contains an extensive bibliography, most of which are published works in Japanese.

7. Gelong Lodro Zangpo, "Robes and Requisites, Part I," *The Profound Path of Peace: A Magazine of the International Kagyü Sangha Association of Buddhist Monks and Nuns* (Pleasant Bay: International Kagyü Sangha Association), Issue #9, 1990, pp. 23-47. This article explains thoroughly the monastic robes and other vestments and requisites in the Tibetan Vajrayana tradition. This article supports the teaching that as Buddhism moved into new climates and cultures the kesa remained the garment worn on top of other garments peculiar to the locale. It also explains the variation in color of kesas as Buddhism moved into new areas. The sources for yellow/brown dye were not available in Tibet, so the maroon color, of which dye was plentiful, was substituted. The saffron color in China was reserved for the emperor, so monastics adopted gray and black for vestments.

8. Marie Lyman, "Distant Mountains: The Influence of Funzo-e on the Tradition of Buddhist Clerical Robes in Japan," *The Textile Museum 1984 Journal*, Vol. 23, pp. 25-41.

*

Rev. Oswin Hollenbeck, Eugene Buddhist Priory, June 2006.

* * *