
The Kesa

Kusen by Sengyo Van Leuven – Rosario, March 2015

Please be careful. Be attentive to your posture. Do not take on a stiff or rigid posture. Do not become a statue.

Breathe calmly, deeply. Adopt a posture which allows you to relax, all the while keeping your energy.

Do not force yourself to adopt an artificial posture. The zazen posture is the most natural one in existence, in order to stay seated, in a relaxed way, in balance, without having to exert one's muscles. Please, during the sesshin, do not only be attentive to your posture during zazen, but also be attentive to your posture during meals. A good posture during meals promotes digestion. Rest upright when you are seated, without leaning on the table, without putting your elbows on the table. Also in the toilets, keep a good posture; not only in terms of the body, but also in terms of the mind. Everywhere, when you are doing samu, when you are sleeping, when you are brushing your teeth, remain conscious and attentive. Be in contact with your body, your posture.

Strengthened by practicing together during the sesshin, we indeed manage to brush against, to touch, to meet the true mind. The true mind is the mind which has nothing special about it, which offers nothing in particular. It is not constrained by personal opinions or habits.

The true mind is not a mind which belongs to itself. But it is a mind which is actualized, which actualizes itself through the steady practice of a continuous letting-go... A mind which does not let itself become absorbed, a mind which expresses the essence of Buddha's teaching. Through which our entire life comes into harmony with the entire universe, through which comes serenity, even amidst blazing passions.

Carefully observe that which every phenomenon is made of. Every aggregate, every component, oneself, others, objects. See what the Three Seals really mean. Respect them. Let them enter one's life. And thus to unveil the true mind. In this way, always continuing to awaken the mind of awakening. To keep achieving this. In the same way that we must always keep breathing, we must always realize this mind of awakening, to let it into our life.

See the vacuity, the lack of ego, in each thing. See the impermanence of things. See the impermanence of the self. That which has been created, disappears, irrevocably. This never remains the same, changes constantly. It is nothing else than a process.

Observe how everything returns to the surface, in interdependence. This is, therefore that is. If this is not, then that is not. Things appear, not in a linear relationship but in a process of conditional coproduction. That is the essence of Buddha's teaching. And is precisely what Buddha's clothing, the kesa, expresses.

The kesa is the symbol of the responsibility that we have towards our own life, towards the life of each and every being in the universe. Without distinguishing between living and non-living

beings, feeling and unfeeling. Without distinguishing between that which has value in society and that which does not, let us say, without considering differently a spoon made of wood and a spoon made of gold. To apprehend all things with the same respect, without distinction, without discrimination, without contempt.

The only thing that is venerated in the life of a practitioner is the kesa itself. To bow before the kesa is to see the Buddha. It is in every person's every action that we see the person itself. Please keep this in mind during this sesshin. Practice it. Be attentive.

Practice always requires the right effort. Perhaps at first this is an effort of will. But, relatively quickly, we must abandon this will. And always orient this right effort towards letting go. To simply be attentive and present, in every action, every thought, every word.

There is a way of practicing which completely respects the right method. The right quantity. The right color. The right way. Not only for the kesa. But also for accommodation. And also for food.

To dress, feed, and house oneself are the three great themes in the lives of everyone. And that is also the case in the life of he who practices the way of the Buddha.

In the "Den-e" chapter, as in that of the Shobogenzo's "Kesa-kudoku," Master Dogen cites different names for the kesa. These names are important not only for our vision of the kesa, but also for our vision of life, of our own attitude, of our relationship with others.

He who wears the kesa, whether the big kesa or the little kesa, such as the rakusu, he who wraps himself in it, expresses the essence of the Buddha's teaching. Be conscious of this and act in harmony with this, respect this. A kesa is not just an ordinary piece of clothing that you are wearing. It is to dress oneself in, to cover oneself with, the Buddha's teaching.

The Buddha sought the Way, practiced it and taught it to enable the liberation of all living beings, for the good of each and all. Whoever wears the kesa must be a conscious being. Whoever wears the kesa must act like the Buddha, because he is wrapped in the Buddha's teaching.

Thus, Dogen call the kesa "butsu-e," clothing of the Awakened One. "Hô-e," clothing of the Law. "Gedatsu-fuku," clothing of liberation. "Fukenden-e," clothing of the field of happiness. "Funzô-e," clothing of rags, of sullied rags. "Ninniku-e," clothing of perseverance. "Musô-e," clothing without form. "Jihi-e," clothing of compassion. "Nyorai-e," clothing of he who has also come. "Anokutara-sanmyaku-sanbodai-e," clothing of perfect and never equaled awakening.

Approach the kesa then in all these aspects. When you sow it, maintain it, and wear it. Study the kesa and in all these aspects. Remember these aspects by studying the mind, by studying oneself, in one's relations with others. Then one can follow the Dharma, instead of following oneself.