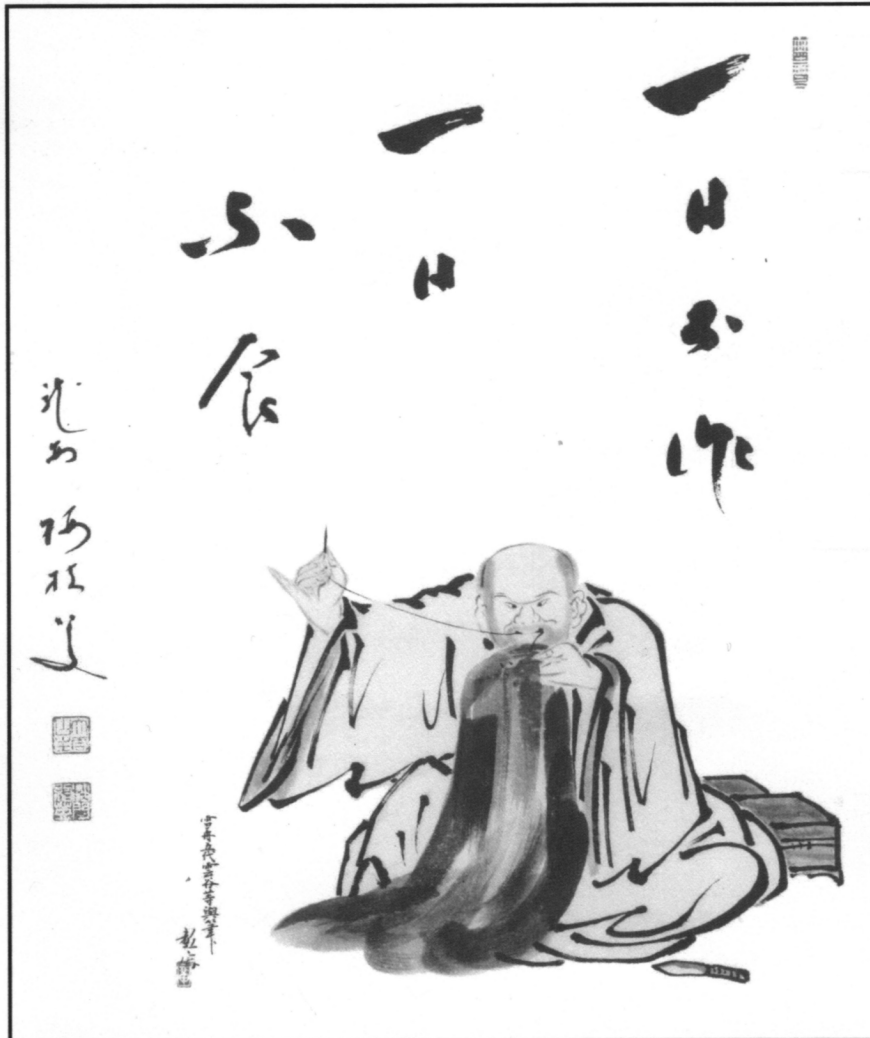


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Crivello's Copy

Buddha's Robe Is Sewn

The Tradition of Sewing Practice in the
Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi American Lineage



A Collection of Quotes and Commentaries

Compiled by Jean Selkirk

Foreword by Sōjun Mel Weitsman and Zenkei Blanche Hartman

The cover illustration is a painting by Shōkai
(Tōyo, the fifth generation from Sesshu of Unkoku-ji)
with calligraphy by Ryōan Baishi.
(Translation courtesy Kazuaki Tanahashi)

The calligraphy also expresses, along with the monk depicted:

“A day without work, a day without eating”

(Translation courtesy Hoitsu Suzuki)

[J. *Ichijitsu nasazareba, ichijitsu kuwarazu*]

Hyakujō Ekai (749-814)

[Zen Master Daichi]

(Shōhaku Okumura, **Dōgen** 72)

The front cover is reproduced from a wall hanging in the San Francisco Zen Center Sewing Room.

Buddha's Robe Is Sewn

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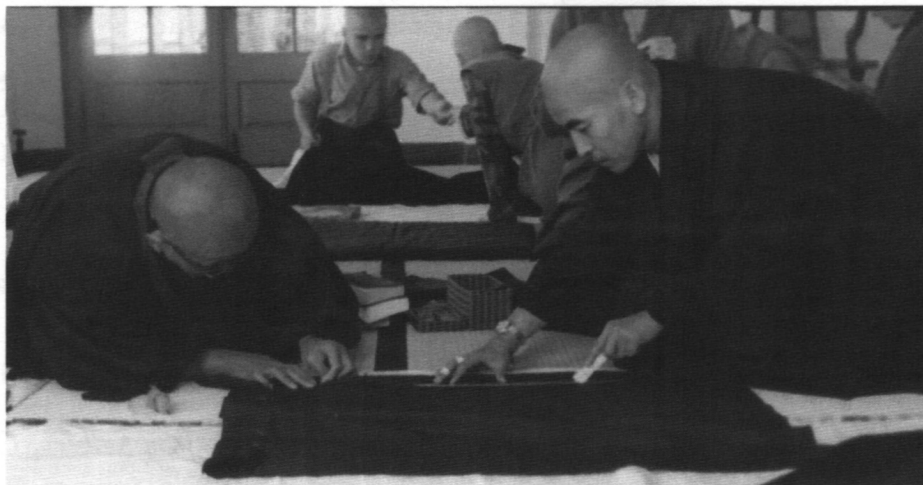
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Sewing Buddha's Robe in Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi's American Lineage



Sewing practice began after Eshun Yoshida-rōshi (seated, second from left, wearing *nyohō-e okesa*), visited San Francisco Zen Center and met Suzuki-rōshi. Here they gather with students at Tassajara Zen Mountain Center (c. 1970-71).

Okusan (wife) of Suzuki-rōshi, Mitsu Suzuki, is seated at the far left. Students: Dianne (Daya) Goldschlag, (kneeling, front). Standing (left to right): assistant to Yoshida-rōshi; Paul Discoe; Louise Welch; Ed Brown; Craig Boyan; Meg Gawler; and Marion Derby.



Eshun Yoshida-rōshi and Dainin Katagiri-rōshi (marking *zagu* with *hera*) during the Sewing Sesshin in the Buddha Hall at San Francisco Zen Center, 1971.

Suzuki-rōshi lineage Dharma teachers quoted in this collection:

Jīko Linda Cutts

Shōsan Victoria Austin

Sōjun Mel Weitsman

Taitaku Pat Phelan

Tenshin Reb Anderson

Zenkei Blanche Hartman

Notes for reader

This collection of quotes is drawn from diverse sources and authors. Complete copies of unpublished dharma discourses and other materials, and the relevant portions of published but rare or out of print texts, are in the Sewing Reader. This is a multi-volume collection of source materials to be found in the libraries of the Berkeley Zen Center and the San Francisco Zen Center.

Quotation marks are assumed. All entries are verbatim from referenced sources except words in [brackets]. Brackets contain my editing, corrections, comments, clarifications, and summaries of longer sections of text. Spelling has been used verbatim and so varies from source to source. Occasional style conformations include the addition of “J.” as an abbreviation for Japanese and *italicizing* most Japanese nouns other than those in common use. Sanskrit words have been left in regular typeface unless different in the text quoted, and are occasionally indicated with “Skt.”

All quotes from Dōgen are indented on the page.

Dharma teachers in the Suzuki-rōshi lineage in the United States who have been quoted in this collection are listed in the box above, alphabetically by their given dharma name. They may be found by dharma name both in this publication’s “Works Cited” and also in the Sewing Reader (cited as “**Sew R.**”). The addition of **Sew R.** to the citation indicates that the source material is not available in book format, though it may have been published in *Windbell*, a publication of the San Francisco Zen Center. If a teacher’s quote is from a published book, an additional standard reference by last name is also provided.

Most teachers in the Suzuki-rōshi lineage use their dharma name, not their family name, when addressed as teacher (J. *sensei* or *rōshi*). To facilitate locating these dharma heirs in “Works Cited,” dharma names (i.e., first name seen above) and the family names of all Asian contributors, those who are *rōshi* and those who are not, are underlined in their index entry, citation, and in “Works Cited.”

Page references for texts in the Sewing Reader are the internal page numbers for each text. Many are transcriptions, either verbatim or edited, of dharma discourses. This is also true for Suzuki-rōshi’s verbatim transcripts, which are bound by date in the San Francisco Zen Center’s Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi Archives. Multiple entries for a single author are distinguished in **bold** either by date or key word from the title of the work in both the citation and “Works Cited.”

Japanese words may not be pluralized; this is in accordance with the rules of the language. The honorifics “rōshi” (old teacher) and “zenji” (zen master) are not capitalized.

At the end of the index is a complete listing of contributors with the location of their work.

Jean Selkirk, Compiler

About the compiler: Jean Selkirk is the sewing teacher at Berkeley Zen Center (Shōgaku-ji, Old Plum Mountain). She was lay ordained by her teacher, Sōjun Mel Weitsman, in year 2000.

Buddha's Robe Is Sewn

The Tradition of Sewing Practice in the Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi American Lineage

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FOREWORD

When we prepare for ordination (J. *tokudo*) we sew Buddha's Robe. Then during ordination, we take the precepts (J. *jukai*), we receive Buddha's Robe, and we receive a *kechimyaku* — a lineage paper that shows that we have become a member of Buddha's family. When we had the first Lay Ordination at Zen Center in 1970, I remember Suzuki-rōshi saying: "When we receive lay ordination, it's not that you're receiving something that makes you better than other people. We don't receive lay ordination just for ourself, but we do this to encourage other people, to encourage everyone. And we do it to encourage each other's practice." The reason we have lay ordination in America is that lay people [householders] are practicing everyday zazen, engaging in daily practice as do priests, which is unique in the world. Whatever merit may accrue from this practice, we offer it to the enlightenment of all beings.

The precepts are the lifeblood of the Buddhas but strictly speaking, there's only one precept: act as Buddha with compassion and selflessness. We think of receiving the precepts as something from outside but it's more like awakening our own innate desire for enlightenment. Until we totally embody selfless, compassionate action, we need the precepts to remind us of how to act in this way.

We receive Buddha's Robe from the preceptor (our teacher). The preceptor is acting as Buddha and giving Buddha's Robe to Buddha. The *rakusu* is a small Buddhist robe that hangs around the neck by straps and is a version of the *okesa* — the large priest's robe which covers the whole body. Buddha's Robe covers the earth, covers everything, and has that symbolism, but I don't think of it as symbolic. I think of the robe as a material manifestation of our Buddha nature. We take one piece of cloth, cut it into many pieces and then sew them back together again in the image of rice fields. This is the way everything in the world exists. Originally, everything is one piece, one whole cloth, but we are conditioned to only see the little pieces of this and that sewn together. It is one whole cloth in a certain configuration called Buddha's Robe. (Lay Ordination)

I want to thank Jean Selkirk for her many hours of determined effort — a labor of love, to research, assemble, and make available this valuable contribution to our knowledge and understanding of the history, meaning, and sewing of Buddha's robe. The community receives it with a deep bow of gratitude.

Abbot Sōjun Mel Weitsman
Berkeley Zen Center



FOREWORD

Sewing Buddha's Robe is first and foremost a devotional practice. Each sewing session begins by offering incense with three prostrations and each session ends with three bows. Taking refuge with each stitch immerses me in *just this stitch*, stitch after stitch, just as following the exhale immerses me in *just this breath* as I sit zazen. We say the refuges in Japanese: "*namu kie butsu*" (Buddha), "*namu kie hō*" (Dharma), "*namu kie sō*" (Sangha), (or simply "*namu kie butsu*") with each stitch. The literal translation of the character for "*ki*" is to plunge into with nothing held back, and the "*e*" means to rely on. So using the Japanese we have the vitality and the vivid image of plunging into and relying on Buddha, Dharma and Sangha stitch after stitch.

I am deeply grateful to the teachers who brought this rich practice to us here in America. First, Yoshida Eshun-rōshi (Hashimoto Ekō-rōshi's disciple) with her assistant Hisae-san, and Tomoe Katagiri who helped her here and who studied sewing further with her in Japan. Yoshida-rōshi encouraged Suzuki-rōshi to give precepts and to have both priests and householders sew their own Buddha's robe. Second, I am grateful to my own beloved teacher, Kasai Jōshin-san (Sawaki Kōdō-rōshi's disciple). I count it as my lucky day when Jōshin-san asked me to assist her, transmitting to me her essential teaching: "*Sew with Heart!*" Her first assistants were Virginia Baker and Pat Herreshoff. Pat prepared the first manual from Jōshin-san's teaching. I am especially grateful to all those who are continuing this practice as sewing teachers at many sanghas around the country.

I was inspired not only to sew my own robe, but to continue the teaching of this practice, by the examples of faith in and devotion to Buddha's robe of Yoshida-rōshi and Jōshin-san. This practice has changed my life much as zazen has changed my life. It is about love as much as it is about refuge, precepts, concentration, attention to detail, making beautiful stitches, exact measurements, or completing the robe once you begin. All of these elements are important, but if I only convey the mechanics of the craft I feel that I am failing my teachers. What they taught me was faith, devotion and love through the medium of sewing Buddha's robe. My hope is that I will be able to repay their kindness by doing for others what they did for me.

Zenkei Blanche Hartman
Zen Center Senior Sewing Teacher



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my teacher, Sōjun Mel Weitsman, whose quiet support and “turning words” always help me. Patiently he answers endless questions. When I am stalled or confused, listening to his guidance or to nearly any of his lectures on any topic carries me out of my whirlpool, flowing toward clarity.

To all the sewing teachers who have taught me and worked with me, especially Linda Galijan, Rebecca Mayeno, and Zenkei Blanche Hartman. They collectively inspire me to keep learning, remind me to stop and share a cup of tea, and patiently endure my efforts to learn, teach, and communicate sewing.

To Zenkei Blanche Hartman for kindly loaning precious books and photographs, for contributing her Tassajara talk, and for endlessly and continually sewing Buddha’s Robe.

To Shōsan Victoria Austin, who contributed her Tassajara talk and other lectures and investigations. Her teaching guided me through unfamiliar ground and inspired me to delve more deeply.

To Ed Brown. I asked him, “Where might sewing a ‘step-by-step robe’ (with its defined steps) meet ‘just cooking’ (without a recipe)?” After reflecting, he responded: “Pay attention to the process.”

To Lewis Richmond, who encouraged the last stretch of a sewing project with words inspired by the *Vimalakirti Sutra*: “Vimalakirti, the in-the-world Bodhisattva — his magical power to sew myriads of thousands of millions of *rakus* — with no needle!”

To Kazuaki Tanahashi for his translations including the elements comprising the sewn robes.

To Tomoe Katagiri for her kind permission to use excerpts from her essay, *Study of the Okesa, Nyohō-e*.

To Celeste West, San Francisco Zen Center librarian, for ongoing kindness and assistance in locating references as well as extensive manuscript editing and suggestions.

To friends and fellow Berkeley Zen Center sangha members Ann Kennedy, Ross Blum and Susan Moon, for reading first drafts and offering manuscript editing. In Zen Center sanghas and beyond, the contributions of support and suggestions from Michael Wenger, Dario Girolami, Andrew Young, and in particular, correction and translation assistance from Shōhaku Okumura and Yuko Okumura.

To Ninzan Valorie Beer, friend and exemplar of great patience in learning to teach sewing.

Many, many bows to all the teachers and scholars whose recorded words appear herein.

*Dedicated to the effort of all sewing teachers and students
Who offer their stitches
Sewing for everyone while everyone sews with them
With gratitude for this practice*

Gokuro Sama Deshita
(Thank you for your honored trouble.)

The body of merit of those bodhisattvas who give a gift without being attached is not easy to measure. (trans. Red Pine, *Diamond Sutra* 85)

So as Bodhidharma said, “no merit.” What will be the merit of practice [asked the emperor]?
“No merit.” . . . Merit itself is zazen. Zazen itself is merit. (*Suzuki-rōshi, Precepts* 30)

INTRODUCTION

My Journey in Sewing Buddha's Robe

When I sewed my *rakusu* (small robe) to receive the Buddhist Bodhisattva precepts in the ceremony of lay ordination, the sewing teacher explained to the class an ancient tradition. Since Shakyamuni Buddha, generations of his disciples wore robes made from discarded cloth sewn in a rice field pattern. Now we would sew the rice field, linking us directly to our ancestors. After the initial awe, I felt like one of the blind men on the bridge in the classic Zen drawing — I had no idea where I was going or how to arrive. Despite these challenges, the intention to affirm my aspiration to practice persisted. As the teacher led me across the bridge, stitch-by-stitch, I watched myself reflected in the sewing.

Continuing to practice and learn, I noticed that sewing and wearing Buddha's Robe deepened my understanding, connection with sangha, and meditation practice (J. *zazen*). Buddha's Robe began to express for me the essence of compassionate bodhisattva practice. First came the effort of offering stitches without thought of gaining anything — even finishing. Then, in treating the robe with gentle respect as if we were one, not two, the robe became tangibly steeped in the caring stillness and openness cultivated by practice.

Perhaps a similar quality drew Kōdō Sawaki-rōshi in 1910 to learn how to make traditional, hand-sewn robes. Like Suzuki-rōshi, he was of the Sōtō School of Zen which Dōgen brought home to Japan from China in 1227. Dōgen carried with him the teachings of *zazen*-only (J. *shikan-taza*) and Buddha's Robe. Significantly, he intended these practices for lay people and monastics alike.



Tomoe Katagiri

Author: Study of the Okesa,
Nyohō-e — Buddha's Robe

As I explored sewing practice, I encountered diverse information from various sources. Suzuki-rōshi spoke about sewing robes in 1971 as he welcomed this practice to the San Francisco Zen Center. The writings of sewing teacher Tomoe Katagiri (Zen Buddhist and widow of Katagiri-rōshi, (see photo, Summer 2006, to left)) came to me from a sangha member. Other sewing teachers offered their research, teachings, and artifacts (see page viii). I read scholarly analyses about the robe and its symbolism in Buddhist schools. Esoteric sects seemed inward, mystical, requiring privileged knowledge; the exoteric more outward, accessible, and describable (see pages 12-16). Then I delved into the nature and purpose of symbols, inquiring into their function and usages.

I had heard that Zen is considered an exoteric school, yet Dōgen-zenji extols the *Ten Merits of the Kashaya* (robe, J. *kesa*) using words more often heard in esoteric traditions, so I wondered what Dōgen really meant when he wrote about “the powers of the robe.” Dōgen says, “When a Buddha Child wears the *kashaya* a vision of stūpas arises” (see page 4).

One possible understanding of Dōgen's assertion came to me from reading Bodhidharma: "[T]he stūpa is your body and mind. When your awareness circles your body and mind without stopping, this is called walking around a stūpa. The sages of long ago followed this path to nirvana." (*Red Pine, Bodhidharma* 101)

I still sensed *kōan* (seemingly unanswerable question(s)) arising. How might the exoteric and esoteric aspects fit together? If the robe is a symbol, and everything contains its opposite and is marked by emptiness, what is an empty symbol or a formless robe?

Suzuki-rōshi tells us that the *okesa* is not just a symbol but dharma itself (see page 1). Hui-Neng (J. *Enō*), the Sixth Ancestor, heard from the Fifth Ancestor: "the dharma . . . the esoteric teaching . . . is transmitted from heart to heart, and the recipient must realize it by his own efforts." Hui-Neng said: "The robe is nothing but a symbol. . . . What I can tell you is not esoteric. . . . If you turn your light inwardly, you will find what is esoteric within you." (Price, *Hui-Neng* 74, 76)

While attempting to penetrate these conceptual riddles, I kept in mind what Suzuki-rōshi said when asked about the pine needle stitch, the design sewn on the flap of the *rakusu* at the back of the neck. After explaining possible symbolic meanings for the emblem, and perhaps to encourage the students to not be overly attached to the symbolism, he described the practical function of the stitch: "that is just to keep, you know, keep two . . . parts tied together." (Shunryū *Suzuki-rōshi*, 71-06-20, 6)

Could all this information be tied together? If the robe worn on the outside *is* dharma, which is the inner teaching, the outward exoteric and inward esoteric mutually inter-penetrate. This resonated for me with the combined opposing rotations represented in the robe character (see page 14), embodied ritually by walking (or drawing, used in silent *kōan* exchange). One direction can mean "going up the mountain [to the monastery, or inner]" and is contained in the other as "going down the mountain [to the town, or outer]." (Oral teaching, *Sōjun* Mel Weitsman)

Going beyond nonduality and duality, Suzuki-rōshi often said, "not one, not two." When "oneness" is believed to be ultimate truth, yet duality appears as the painful reality, esoteric practices can be viewed as a transformative means to affirm and attain oneness. People throughout the eons have ritually used symbolic objects endeavoring to heal their experience of separation. Buddha's lesson for humanity is that connection and perfection already exist. He taught that only in the stillness of complete attention is the karmic chain reaction of contact with life slowed, opening us to allow, in Suzuki-rōshi's words, "things as it is."

Accepting reality as perfect allows space for genuine transformation to arise from within. Participating in the authentic inner practice of zazen, taking refuge stitch-by-stitch to sew the whole body of Buddha in the form of Buddha's Robe, and engaging in the practice of receiving the precepts and wearing Buddha's Robe are all pathways. When vow is mindfully enacted and embodied as practice, Dharma is realized in our everyday life. Trusted as true, our own personal wisdom emerges. Remembered, our lives have foundation for growth.

"*Bodhi* is to be found within our own mind ["heart-mind"], and there is no necessity to look for mysticism from without." (Price, *Hui-Neng* 61, 93) Zazen is available to everyone, needing no secret initiation or symbols. Yet, what I see as the essential function of any symbol is its ability to wake me up and remember that the most powerful magic is practicing compassion now and staying present, instead of escaping into the past or future.

Still curious about Dōgen's teachings, I explored Hee-Jin Kim's book, *Eihei Dōgen, Mystical Realist*. Rather than accepting other sects' teachings of reliance on esoteric rituals and doctrine, Dōgen radically transformed their elements and meaning. Excluding nothing from Buddhature, Dōgen used language to expand comprehension of reality, redefining the use of symbols. Symbol and symbolized were neither one nor two. "[O]pposites or dualities were not obliterated or even blurred; they were not so much transcended as they were realized." (Kim 55) Dōgen's core teaching is this: Practice is enlightenment. He gives his answer to esoteric practices as immersion in the world:

One's daily life is the realization of ultimate reality. (*Dōgen-zenji, Genjōkōan*)

Suzuki-rōshi's student Sōjun Mel Weitsman saw his teacher's life as a "mantra" — mantra not as a sound or magical spell but as a kind of samādhi or attention. "Every day he did the same thing, which was amazing to me. . . . His life was devoted to sitting zazen, bowing, lighting incense, and the various other things that he did." (Sōjun Mel Weitsman, *Mantra* 1-2) Dōgen says: "Those who regard mundane activity as an obstacle to the Buddha-dharma know only that there is no Buddha-dharma in the mundane life; they do not yet know that there is no mundane life in the Buddha-dharma."¹²² [*Shōbōgenzō, "Bendōwa"*] (Kim 42-3)

In sewing — as in anything — the truly mysterious is manifest. Even when the stitches seem endless, we focus on the details of the process. Despite preference and choice, when we just plunge in and let go of the outcome, those seamless moments arise when the needle and stitches, breathing and chanting, just happen. The careful weighing of myriad decisions needs no more thought, and the caring becomes indistinguishable from the action; the field far beyond arises. The "formless robe" is a "seamless stūpa."¹ Both are empty symbols: the robe of many seams is a robe of no seams that is seamlessly stitched. We all sew the same stitch differently, "magically, with no needle"² on Buddha's Robe of 84,000 rows³ of wisdom⁴ covering the entire universe. This seems impossible, yet remembering my version of the Bodhisattva vow helps me:

*Distinctions are immeasurable, I vow consistency
Nothing is separate, I vow discernment*

When I became a sewing teacher, all I'd read began to come alive as I experienced the twin challenges of sharing what I learned and helping students find their quiet center within this activity. I wanted to extend these teachings to others. Like Buddha's Robe, this collection of quotes is patched together — not of found cloth, but of voices from various sources in different styles, sutured into a teaching. Sewing and then receiving Buddha's Robe and the Bodhisattva Precepts is an activity not easily expressed in words, although I offer this effort. If you find this guide in your hands, may it be an encouragement to explore and intimately penetrate this experience with your teacher.

Jean Selkirk, Compiler

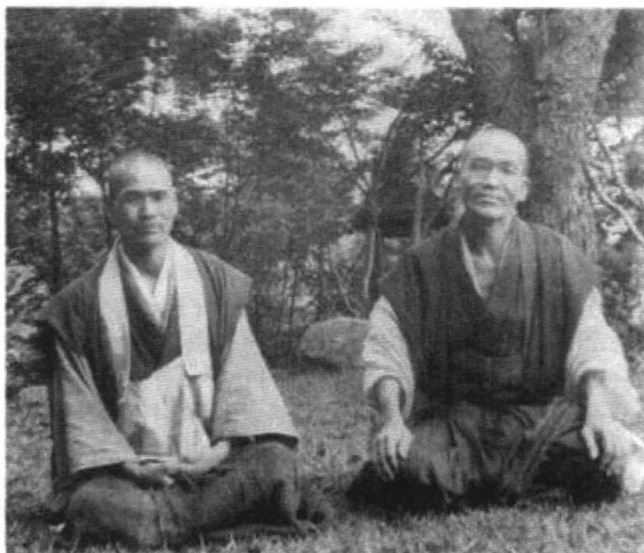


¹ Faure acknowledges a "formless robe" yet questions the existence of a "seamless kāṣāya." (Faure, *Kāṣāya* 354, 361)

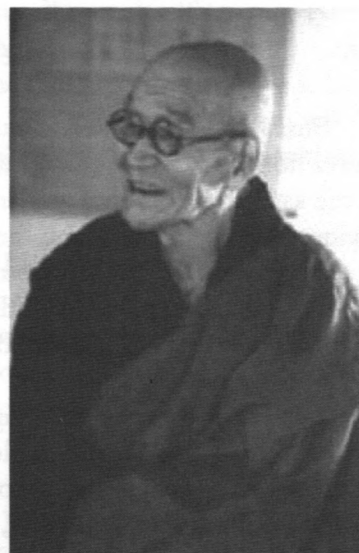
^{2, 3, 4} See Richmond, page v; *Dōgen-zenji* "Den-e" 140; Price, *Hui-Neng* 82.

DHARMA OF BUDDHA'S ROBE

Our *okesa* [robe] is not just — just symbol of our teaching, but it is actually dharma itself. But unless you have proper understanding of it, the *rakusu* [small robe] is something which you wear as a symbol of [being a] Buddhist. But that is not proper understanding. The proper understanding of our zazen or *rakusu* is same, not different. . . . So unless you have real experience of zazen — zazen experience, *rakusu* is not actually *rakusu*; it is just something which you wear. It is not dharma itself. (Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi, 71-06-20, 1)



Kōdō Sawaki-rōshi (right). Mt. Mannichi, Kumamoto, ~1929.
[Caption translations on this page courtesy Yuko Okumura.]



Kōdō Sawaki-rōshi
Daijōji, Kanazawa, November 1961.

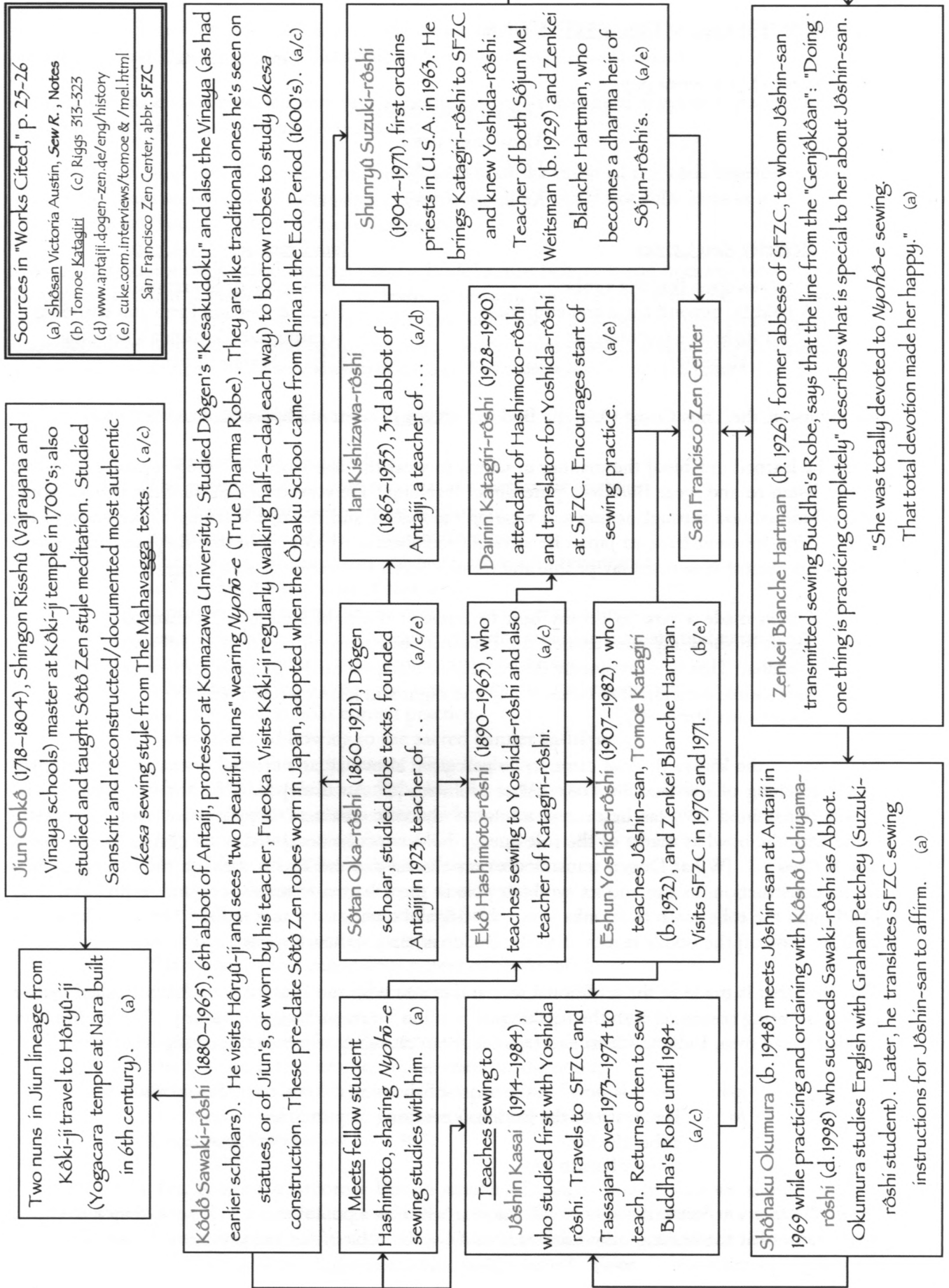
When “Drizzle and dew, mist and clouds cover our bodies” we are calm and unworried. By wearing the *kesa*, we find peace of both mind and body. . . . The *kesa* is the symbol of the substance of the Buddha’s Law, the garment of “drizzle and dew, mist and clouds” [“those in cloud robes and mist sleeves” (Dōgen-zenji, **Gabyō** 134)]. Heaven and earth, the entire universe, are one single *kesa*. No world exists outside of the *kesa*. We do not fall into hell or rise up to heaven — we go nowhere, we come from nowhere. There is only one *kesa*. The towns of Kyoto and Nara were laid out in the pattern of a *kesa*. “Drizzle and dew, mist and clouds cover our bodies.” We owe it to ourselves to wear the *kesa*. (Kōdō Sawaki-rōshi)

One day an *unsui* [cloud water] asked me the meaning of the *kesa*. When I replied, “The *kesa* is something which is not clear,” he [a monk] looked at me as though I were talking rubbish. But the *kesa* truly is something indefinite, both in its muted color (the indefinable color of ruins or rags) and in its measurements that obey no exact rules. Its color and measurements have no outward appearance. For this reason it has been called the garment of the rice-field of unlimited happiness. (Kōdō Sawaki-rōshi)

[T]he patchrobed ones . . . who are like clouds, having no fixed abode,
flowing onward like a stream, attached to nothing, who are called true monks.
Dōgen-zenji, **Zuimonki** 107)

Kōdō Sawaki-rōshi started going up there [Kōki-ji] and looking at Jiun Onkō’s [Shingon priest] *kesas* and studying them. He had studied the Vinaya [detailed rules for monastic life] and understood this was the most authentic way to make Buddha’s robe. (Zenkei Blanche Hartman, **Sew R.**, **Tassajara** 5)

Legacy of Sewing Buddha's Robe and its Transmission to the Suzuki-rōshi Lineage



DŌGEN TRANSMITS THE KESA

Robe Verse (J. *Takkesa ge*)

Dai sai gedap-puku
Musō fuku den e
Hi bu nyorai kyo
Ko dō shoshu jō (Sotoshu 132)

Berkeley Zen Center

Now we open Buddha's robe
A field far beyond form and emptiness
The Tathāgata's teaching for
all beings

San Francisco Zen Center

Great robe of liberation
Field far beyond form and emptiness
Wearing the Tathāgata's teaching
Saving all beings

We say *nyorai*, the Thus Come One, the Buddha. (Shōsan Victoria Austin, *Sew R.*, Class 6)

[After he learned in China] the manner in which to wear the *kesa* [robe] . . . Dōgen-zenji . . . vowed to see, listen to and wear Buddha's pure direct teaching. He vowed that all sentient beings would attain Buddhahood through seeing and wearing the *nyohō-e*, and through listening to the verse of the *okesa*. After he went back to Japan he strongly recommended to people that they wear the *nyohō-e* and by his earnest vow many lay people and monks began to wear it. (Tomoe Katagiri 5)

I then made a vow to do my best to transmit the right Buddhist Dharma to Japan to show my countrymen the Buddhist *kesa* transmitted from Buddha to Buddha. That was my sincere desire. Those disciples of Buddha who possess a *kesa* should venerate it ceaselessly day and night and learn its true merit.
(Dōgen-zenji, *Den-e* 147)

In China . . . the *kāṣāya* [J. *kesa*] came to be perceived above all as a symbol or material counterpart of the teaching of the Buddha (338). After Huineng [6th Ancestor] (d. 713), the . . . *kāṣāya* is no longer transmitted (339) [as before, as a unique 'dynastic treasure,' inherited ancestor to ancestor along with the bowl as marks of the sole lineage-holder recognition.] [Also see (Shōsan Victoria Austin, *Sew R.* Class 5).] [W]hat Dōgen transmits is only the *belief* in the *kāṣāya* through the orthodox rules for its construction, its use and its symbolic role in the Dharma transmission [and ordination] (344). [A]lthough the robe worn by monks is not the original one, it is its true replica (349). . . . The *kāṣāya* itself, is '[one of] the bodily marks of all the Buddhas' (350). (Faure, *Kāṣāya*)

The *okesa* that is made in the traditional way and is one with the Buddha's teaching is called *nyohō-e*. [*Nyohō* is "being congenial with the teaching of Buddha." (Tsūgen Narasaki-rōshi 61)]. . . which has been handed down from India to China and Japan without changing its original teaching and form.

nyo "as-it-is-ness" in the sense of showing the law or truth as it really is
hō law, truth or the Buddha's teaching or principle
e robe, clothes
(Tomoe Katagiri 3-4)

Originally *kesaya* in Sanskrit, we now call the *kesa* '*okesa*' as a polite term. . . . Dōgen-zenji introduced many names for the *okesa* . . . the robe of liberation, the robe of the field of virtue [J. *fukuden-e*], and the robe of formlessness [J. *musō*]. (Shōhaku Okumura, *Lecture* 1-2)

[Two Dōgen fascicles (*J. no maki*) are written about the *okesa*: Kesa-kudoku no maki (“Virtue of the Okesa”) and Den-e no maki (“Transmitted Robe”). (Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi 71-06-20, 1)

Most of the material is repeated verbatim in both texts and it has been suggested that ‘Den’e’ was merely a draft for ‘Kesa-kudoku.’ (Faure, *Kāṣāya* 344)

Dōgen-zenji says, “I could continue talking about the merit of the *okesa* forever, and the merit would not be exhausted. In my entire life I could not fully express it. It is that vast and boundless.” (Tomoe Katagiri 26)

Even if you cannot understand that the *okesa* is Buddha, just believe it and honestly treat it as such. Doing this is called *sangaku* [*kufū*] . . . “to learn zazen with concentrated reflection.” However, to learn zazen is not to try to understand it through our head. It is beyond understanding or not understanding: just believe it and try to practice as Shakyamuni Buddha taught. (Tomoe Katagiri 23) [*Sangaku* is 3 types (precepts/meditation/wisdom) of learning. *Kufū* is single-minded zazen.] (Yokoi 419, 577)

Then the world-honored One said in a verse:

Listen carefully, Jnānaprabha.
The great happiness-field robe has ten victorious qualities:
While worldly clothes increase defilement,
the dharma robe of the Tathāgata does not.
The dharma robe provides modesty, completes repentance,
and creates the rice field of happiness.
It protects you from cold, heat, and poisonous creatures
and strengthens your way-seeking mind for attaining ultimate understanding.
Manifesting the form of a mendicant home-leaver,
it frees people from greed and desire, cuts off five wrong views,
and helps you to hold correct practice.
By revering and bowing to the sacred banner kashāya,
you will have the happiness of King Brahma.
When a Buddha child wears the kashāya a vision of a stūpa arises,
creating happiness, eliminating unwholesomeness,
and joining humans and devas.
The noble form of the kashāya arouses respect
in a true seeker who is free from worldly dust.
All buddhas praise it as an excellent field
most beneficial to sentient beings.
The inconceivable miraculous power of the kashāya
nurtures practice for enlightenment.
The sprout of practice grows in the spring field,
the splendid fruit of enlightenment is like a harvest in autumn.
The kashāya is true armor, impenetrable as diamond,
the deadly arrows of delusion cannot pierce it.
I have now recited the ten excellent merits of kashāya.
(Dōgen-zenji, **Power of the Robe** 96-7)

When a *kesa* is worn it becomes like an amulet of enlightenment, and we should honestly receive it as such. It is said that if you believe a single verse or a single phrase about a *kesa*, the merit of the *kesa* will be transformed into a brilliant light of the eternal Buddhist Way. (Dōgen-zenji, **Den-e** 143)

RECEIVING BUDDHA'S ROBE

In this lineage when you sew a *rakusu*, you don't put your *rakusu* on and start wearing it right away, but give it to a teacher [preceptor] to give to you [at that time, you recite the chant below three times from the *Kesa* Receiving Ceremony (J. *Jue-sabo*) (Tsūgen *Narasaki-rōshi* 65)]. [Or first to your sewing teacher. (See Zenkei Blanche Hartman, *Sew R., Receiving Ceremony*.)] So although we sew the *rakusu*, it is not ours until it is given to us. . . . This process recognizes our interconnection, the importance of having a teaching, a group and a teacher to practice with. We don't go off by ourselves to get enlightened; we practice with all beings, for the benefit of all beings. (*Taitaku* Pat Phelan, *Sew R.* 5)

I, (dharma name), Buddha's Disciple, receive this robe of (five/seven/nine) jō, each jō, made from (one/two) long and one short piece. I will wear this robe of Buddha with the mind and body of its sacred meaning.

The *Jukai* Ceremony is also called the Bodhisattva Initiation. . . . The word *Jukai* is Japanese, and it is written with two characters: the second character, *kai*, refers to the precepts, and the first character *ju* means both "to give" and "to receive." *Jukai* is the ceremony of giving and receiving the precepts. In Zen we use the Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts which are given both in priest [leave home, (J. *Shukke*)] and lay [stay home, (J. *Zaike*)] ordination [(J. *Tokudo*)] ceremonies. (*Taitaku* Pat Phelan, *Sew R.* 1)

[People wish for the guidance of the precepts in their life. Instead of expressing this directly, they may ask to sew a *rakusu*. The finite process of sewing may seem less intimidating though still challenging for many. Yet asking to sew is not synonymous with asking permission to receive the precepts. Tenshin Reb Anderson tells us:] When you actually ask, "May I receive the precepts?," you touch something very deep in yourself. (*Tenshin* Reb Anderson, or Anderson, *Being Upright* 4)

In the bodhisattva initiation ceremony, we begin by invoking the presence of all great and enlightened beings. We invite them to sustain and support us as we enter buddha's way. We open our hearts and minds to their wisdom and compassion. (7) [W]e do not say the bodhisattva vow explicitly, yet it forms the background for receiving the Sixteen Great Bodhisattva Precepts. (4) (*Tenshin* Reb Anderson, or Anderson, *Being Upright*)

Bodhisattva Vows

Beings are numberless, I vow to awaken with them.

Delusions are inexhaustible, I vow to end them.

Dharma gates are boundless, I vow to enter them.

Buddha's way is unsurpassable, I vow to become it.

The Three Refuges

I take refuge in Buddha.

I take refuge in Dharma.

I take refuge in Sangha.

The Three Pure Precepts

I vow to refrain from all evil.

I vow to do all that is good.

I vow to live and be lived for the benefit of all beings.

The Ten Clear Mind Precepts

1. I resolve not to kill, but to cherish all life.
2. I resolve not to steal, but to honor the gift not yet given.
3. I resolve not to misuse sexuality, but to remain faithful in relationships.
4. I resolve not to lie, but to communicate the truth.
5. I resolve not to sell or use the wine and drugs of delusion, but to polish clarity.
6. I resolve not to dwell on the mistakes of others, but to create wisdom from ignorance.
7. I resolve not to praise myself and downgrade others, but to maintain modesty, putting others first.
8. I resolve not to withhold spiritual or material aid, but to share understanding, giving freely of self.
9. I resolve not to harbor ill will, but to dwell in equanimity.
10. I resolve not to abuse the Three Treasures, in respecting the Buddha, unfolding the Dharma, and nourishing the Sangha.

(Berkeley Zen Center Liturgy)

[T]he real meaning of precepts is not just rules, but is rather our way of life. . . . How you keep the precepts is how you organize your life. And how you organize your life is how we practice zazen. . . . zazen practice is precepts, one of the precepts and all of the precepts. (*Suzuki-rōshi*, *Precepts* 29-30)

“The Formless Field of Benefaction” [These stories about practice and Buddha’s Robe were told by Shōsan Victoria Austin at **Tassajara** in a talk given with Zenkei Blanche Hartman.]

After we sit zazen in the morning we chant: “The great robe of liberation . . .” So why do we chant this? . . . [W]hat does Buddha’s robe have to do with practice? . . . Whether one is wearing such a robe or not wearing such a robe, acknowledging it is an important part of our practice. . . . We say, “*Dai sai gedap-puku*” “Great robe of, great liberation.” “*Musō fuku den e*” “beyond form.” A “*fukuden*” is a “field of blessing,” of “*ku do ku*,” of merit, of auspiciousness. . . . [more literally] a “formless field of benefaction.”

Ordination

What is a “formless field of benefaction?” Tassajara (our practice place) is a formless field of benefaction. . . . Coming here and coming together and doing this practice brings up a quality of liberation that’s not exactly about being in a forest or being in a village or being with nice friendly people. Long, long ago, when the Buddha was teaching, it was this quality that brought many people to him. To study, to follow him. His ordination was not complicated. People would come to him, and he would say, “Come, monk. Come monk.” And that would be the first time that they would be called a monk, and then they would come. And that was their ordination.



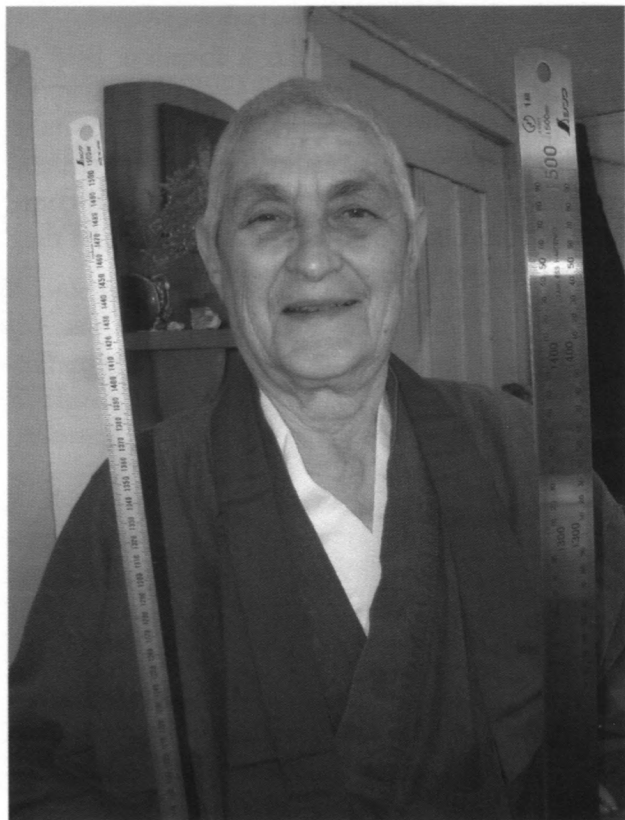
*Zaike Tokudo (Lay Ordination) at Berkeley Zen Center.
(Sōjun Mel Weitsman with ordinee.)*

They decided to follow the Buddhist teachings because the teaching had something to do with noticing the part of life that everybody notices but doesn’t really want to notice and actually addressing that. . . . [One story about this is that during] the time of the Buddha in the social system there were various social strata that people could be in. If a person of one of the higher castes was there and the shadow of [an] “untouchable” person crossed their water, they couldn’t drink it without elaborate rituals of purification where the shadow touched them.

One time the Buddha and other monks were down at the edge of the water, and the Buddha expressed his intention to go into the water. Then from the bushes came a voice saying, “No, don’t go down there, I’ve been down here. I’m hiding in this bush so that my shadow won’t pollute you.” The Buddha said, “Please come out.” He asked the man about the lake, and then he went down and drank from the lake. Then the man said, “Aren’t you scared of getting polluted?” The Buddha responded, “No, a real Brahmin (the Brahmins were the lawgivers and holders of the culture), a real Brahmin is one who looks at suffering and addresses that problem through practice. One who pays attention to life and one who helps people.”

And the man was so moved that he started to cry, and the man said, “You mean, anybody?” And the Buddha said, “Yes. For instance, you.” Buddha invited the man to join his order, saying, “Come, monk.” This was totally different from the thinking of the time. Not only did the Buddha notice something that most people just accepted as the way things were, but he thoroughly addressed the suffering in that situation in a very natural way.

It was this quality of the Buddha’s cultivating a “formless field of benefaction” anyplace the Buddha was, that encouraged people of all walks of life to follow the Buddha and to study his teachings.



Zenkei Blanche Hartman with tools of the practice in the sewing room at San Francisco Zen Center, Spring 2004.
Photo by sewing teacher Cynthia Gair, with permission.

King Bimbasāra

Vicki: One of the Buddha’s followers was named King Bimbasāra. One time while riding he saw what he thought was a Buddhist monk in the distance. I was told that he got off his horse . . .

Blanche: Horse? I was told that King Bimbasāra got down from his howdah upon an elephant! [see image below]

Vicki: We could read the stories. Either way, the king went to a lot of effort, and bowed all the way to the dusty ground. Then he approached the monk to ask for teaching, and to his horror, it wasn't a Buddhist monk. And he got mad. He stormed over to the Buddha.

“Lord!?”

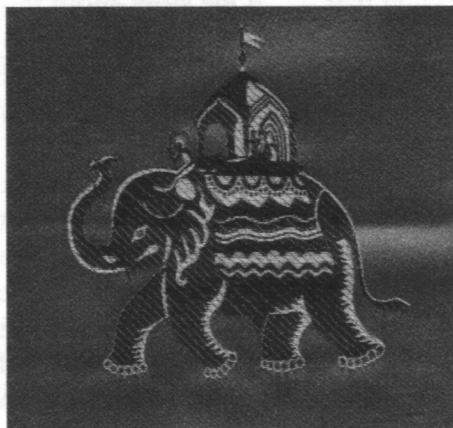
Buddha said, “Yes?”

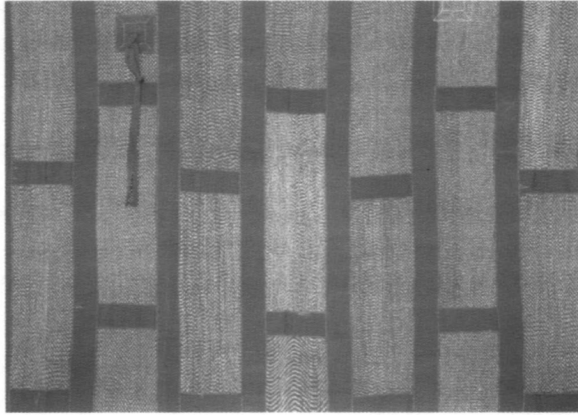
The King said, “Your followers don't have any recognizable way for me to recognize them. So I'm just bowing to anybody. Would you please do something about this and give your disciples clothing by which I could recognize them?”

And the Buddha said, “Yes.”

Rice Field Pattern

A few weeks later, the Buddha was walking with Ananda . . . and they happened to walk in a rice field. The Buddha said, “Do you notice the pattern of the rice field?” Ananda said, “Yes.” Buddha said, “Notice how there's the place where the water is. You can see the young rice and the paths that are raised through the rice field make a pattern. And one path goes this way and the other path goes that way, and then there's corners there, and there's fields.”





Seven panel *okesa* stitched with a type of traditional *sashiko* or embroidery stitch called *zokin-zashi* or “cleaning cloth” stitch, described as “rain” stitching in America.

(As many as 45 vertical rows of stitching create the pattern on a panel.)
 Photo by Echū *Kyūma-rōshi*, with permission.

Aerial view of rice field (right).
 (Kyūma, *Story of the Kashaya* 3)



“Would you be able to design a piece of clothing that had this pattern? That had fields and paths?” Ananda said, “Yes.”

And he did. He brought his design to the Buddha and the Buddha said, “Okay, this is the robe.” Ananda sewed it. It says in the sutra: . . . “And he can make the cross-seams, and the intermediate cross-seams, and the great circles,¹ and the lesser circles,¹ and the turning in, and the lining of the turning in, and the collar-piece.²” (*Vinaya*, Mahāvagga VIII, Chap 12, 208-9). Ananda was skilled in all this. In other words, Ananda could sew. He was skilled at sewing.

You can read about this in “Mahavagga VIII” which is in the *Vinaya*. It’s a long process of learning [about the fabric and colors . . . the monks had many questions about making robes of used cloth]: “But Lord, it’s all different colors.” [The Buddha said:] “This is pure cloth. We’re going to stain it a muddy color, a mixed color — not a pure color.” And that’s the meaning of the word *kashāya*, muddy color. All of that cloth no matter where it came from, is dyed the same color. In the process of washing it, and looking at it, and paying attention to it, and taking care of it, and sewing it, and looking at it with the intention to make a robe out of it, it turned from something nobody wanted, to a “formless field of benefaction.” And more important than that, the monks who worked with that cloth turned from anybody [in]to a “formless field of benefaction” because the robe is not a thing. The robe we make is not a thing. It’s a teaching, and it’s a teaching that looks like this.

In the *Kesa-kudoku* Dōgen-zenji is saying . . . that the robe covers the entire “formless field of benefaction,” which is here, which includes everything, and which has the pattern of the earth. So, it’s not a thing, it’s not an object. If someone were to take away my robes, I wouldn’t have lost the robe. It’s a wonderful teaching. (*Shōsan* Victoria Austin, *Sew R., Tassajara* 5-8)

¹ The *chōjō* and *tanjō* (long and short panels in robe). “Circle” symbolically meaning totality (Skt. mandalan, addhmandalan); (Pali, mandala, addhamandala).

² Overcollar (Skt. gīveyyakan) prevented wear on the center *jō* or (Skt.) vivattan (Pali, vivatta), meaning new beginning, constant change. (*Thanissaro* Bhikkhu)

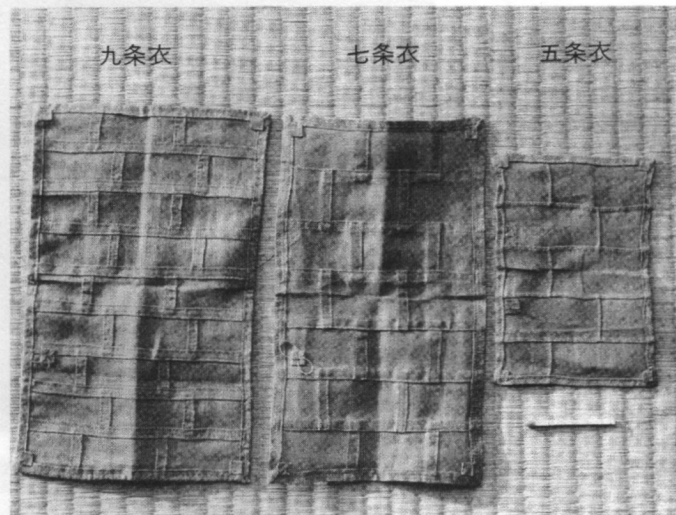
WEARING BUDDHA'S ROBE

*I am happy in my kesa,
Calmly I possess the universe.
I stay or leave as it wishes.
The pure breeze drives the white clouds.*

(Kōdō Sawaki-rōshi quotes Daichi Sokei (1290–1366))

[The reason Dōgen] refers to . . . many kinds of robe[s] is [that the] robe should be always with you. He put emphasis to wear or to have robe always with you, you know. It is not some special thing you wear, you know. That is wrong idea. . . . [It] is something which you have always with you, like the Third Patriarch in India's robe. He was born with robe, so for him it is not possible to take it off [laughs]. His skin is already robe. Those are the most important point when you . . . want to have proper understanding of *okesa*. (Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi, 71-06-20, 5)

[M]onks should not leave the *san-ne* [three requisite garments, literally “three cloths” (Lyman 25)] behind. . . . *Shōsan-ne* is a miniature size *san-ne* [for] travel . . . started in the time of Keizan-zenji (1269-1325). [See image below: note the matchstick at lower right.] (Tomoe Katagiri 19)



Shōsan-ne
(Kyūma, Story of the Kashaya 38)

Tozan asked a monk, “What is most painful?” The monk replied, “To be in hell is most painful.” Tozan said, “No it isn’t.” Then the monk asked, “What do you think, then, is the most painful?” Tozan replied, “Wearing the *okesa* yet not having clarified the great matter is the most painful.” . . . One of the most famous sayings of Sawaki-rōshi is, “Wear the *okesa* and sit in zazen: that’s all.” That’s it. There is nothing else to search for. There’s nowhere to go. Still we look for something more valuable. We often find that we are still hungry ghosts in samsāra even though we are sitting in the zendo. Whenever we find that we are deviating from where we are now, we go back to right now, right here, by letting go.” (Shōhaku Okumura, Lecture 4)

The awareness of the treasure of being disciples of Buddha, Buddha containers, is cultivated by wearing the *okesa*. (Tomoe Katagiri 19)

And there’s something about these robes that inspires people who see them and people who wear them. (Shōsan Victoria Austin, Sew R., Tassajara 5)

Practice of Cultivating the Empty Field

[W]e can discuss [the robe] as a thing, but the main merit of it is as a practice. It's actually when we practice, we wear a garment that's not made according to the dictates of fashion, but because it was passed down to us, warm hand to warm hand, generation to generation, from the time of the Buddha until now. That's the function of the clothing for us. And that's the spirit in which we accept and wear it. . . . We do have to treat these clothes with the utmost respect, and treat them like the body of practice, because that is what it is for us. (Shōsan Victoria Austin, *Sew R.*, Class 13)

[The Buddha woke up in a farming village], put on the *okesa* and went out to the village for *takuhatsu* [begging for food]. [A rich farmer asks why the Buddha doesn't work if he, a rich man, still works. The Buddha answers:] "Faith is a seed. Practice is rain. Wisdom is my yoke and plow. Repentance [having a sense of shame] is my plow bar. Aspiration is a rope to tie a yoke to an ox. And mindfulness is plow-blade and digging bar. I behave myself prudently. I am discreet in speech. I eat moderately. Truth is my sickle to mow grass. Gentleness is untying the yoke from an ox when finished working. Diligence is my ox which takes me to peacefulness (nirvana). I go forth without backsliding. Once I reach the peacefulness, I have no anxiety. My farming is done in this way. It brings about the result of a sweet dew. If you engage in this farming, you will be released from all kinds of suffering." [Retold from the *Sutta-nipata* 4:1 (various sources).] (Shōhaku Okumura, *Lecture 3*)

The farmer became Buddha's disciple. Buddha's farming is a practice to become free from ego-attachment and live in peacefulness. This is the meaning of working in [a] rice paddy. When we wear the *okesa*, we are also farming. This is the origin of the name of *okesa*: *fukuden-e* or robe of virtuous field. This body and mind are the field we work on. It is not just a field of fortune from which we can expect to receive blessings without practice. We have to cultivate our life. (Shōhaku Okumura, *Lecture 3*)

Types of Robes

San-ne

[The three requisite garments of Buddha's disciples are a set of robes (see below). This number was determined by the Buddha to be enough to stay warm on the coldest nights if worn one over the other. Three robes and *ōryōki* are the only possessions of monks and must be carried with them wherever they go.] (Tomoe Katagiri 19-20) [The traditional eight requisites add: waistband (girdle), water strainer, razor, needle (sewing kit).] (I-tsing 54)

Okesa

[*Kassetsu-e* style of *okesas* are made of an odd-number of panels (J. *jō*). If five panels, each is of one long piece (J. *chō*) and one short piece (J. *tan*); if seven or nine, two long pieces and one short piece. Nine or more are grouped by number of panels; as the number grows, more long pieces are added.]

Five-row *keśāya*

Name: *Gojō-e* (Skt. *Antaravasa*)

Purpose: Work, travel, or alone in one's room

Seven-row *keśāya*

Name: *Shichijō-e*, *Nyūjū-e* (Skt. *Uttarasanga*)

Purpose: *Nyūjū* — public activities: zazen, chanting, meals, lectures, begging

Nine-row *keśāya* (also called great robe (J. *dai-e*) and lined)

Name: *Kujō-e* (Skt. *Sanghati*)

Purpose: Teaching, begging, conducting ceremonies
(Tomoe Katagiri 15-19; Narasaki-rōshi 64-67)

The etymology of the Sanskrit words inspired these symbolic interpretations:

Antarvāsas: liberation of unceasing inner dwelling

Uttarāsāṅgha: devotion to sitting without clinging

Samghāṭi: at one with sanghas beyond sanghas

(Selkirk, *Three Requisite Robes*, *Sew R.*)

Rakusu

In the middle of the 19th century, in the Meiji Restoration in Japan, the government and the people simplified many things. At that time the *rakusu* was created. (Ian Kishizawa 21)

[*Rakusu* is] a miniature, symbolic version of a *kesa*. . . . Nuns and monks . . . began to include working . . . as an essential dimension of Buddhist practice. Since it was cumbersome to work with so many layers . . . the *rakusu* was developed. [Made with long straps to be secured by belt at the waist while working — see images on pages 1, 17, and to right.] (Arai 113)

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A *rakusu* is made from the basic structure of the five-row *okesa*, so it is a kind of *okesa*. . . . using the *nyohō-e* material, color and way of cutting; however, it doesn't follow *nyohō-e* size. Therefore, strictly speaking, to call it *nyohō-e* is not correct; however, we must not cling too much to form. (Tomoe Katagiri 21)

[T]his *rakusu* is Buddha's robe as much as an *okesa* is.
(Shōsan Victoria Austin, *Sew R., Class 5*)

Wagesa: [A *rakusu* made by representing a “folded” five-row *kesa* as a strap shape to be worn around the neck; received in *Jukai* ceremony (not ordination) when five precepts are given.] Tsūgen Narasaki-rōshi, 65)



Rakusu
(Till/Swart)

Care [See “Care of the *Rakusu*” (inside back cover) for present day practices of care and cleaning.]

When we are not wearing the *okesa*, we should put it in a case or wrapper [J. *fukuro*] and put it on an altar [high place]. When carrying it we should also put it in a case, and keep it separate from other clothes. As disciples of Buddha, we should not forget a *rakusu* or *ōryōki* [are] Buddha. People forget that they are Buddha and put them in the wrong place because they do not have the Buddha's image on them. This is regrettable as disciples of Buddha, and we need to be more mindful.
(Tomoe Katagiri 23)

Cleaning

This is how to wash a *kashāya*: you put it unfolded into a clean wooden tub, cover it with thoroughly boiled water that has been purified by incense, and leave it for one hour [roughly two hours by the modern way of counting]. Another way is to boil water mixed with pure ash and cover the *kashāya* until the water cools. Nowadays it is common to use ash water. It is called *aku no yu* in Japan.

When the ash water cools, rinse the *kashāya* with clear hot water many times. Do not scrub it with your hands or stamp on it. After thus removing sweat and oil stains, mix fragrant powder of sandalwood or aloeswood with cold water and rinse the *kashāya* in it.

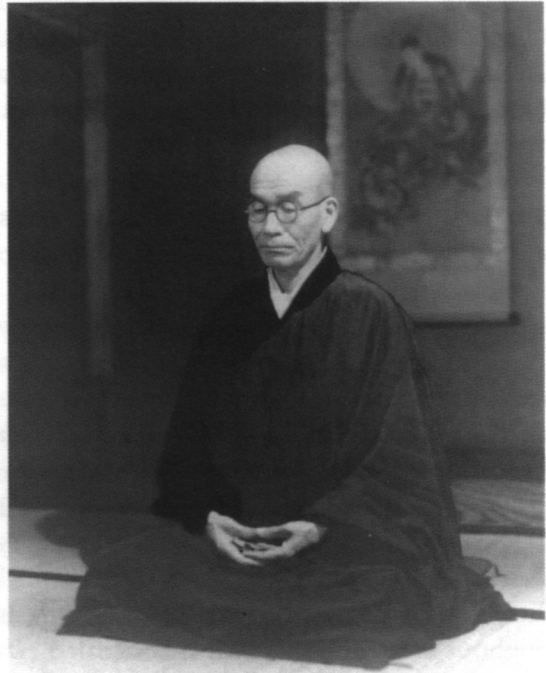
Then hang it on a clean rod to dry. When it is completely dry, fold it, and put it on the altar. Then burn incense, spread flower petals on the altar, circumambulate the *kashāya* clockwise a few times, and bow to it. After three, six or nine full bows, kneel and put your palms together; then hold up the *kashāya* with both hands, chant the *kashāya* verse and put it on properly.

(Dōgen-zenji, *Power of the Robe* 86-87)

SYMBOLISM

*Wherever it goes,
The snail is at home when it dies.
There is no world outside the kesa.*

(Kōdō Sawaki-rōshi quotes popular
verse (type, J. *senryū*), poet unknown.)



Kōdō Sawaki-rōshi

You should know that a kashāya is what all buddhas respect and take refuge in. It is the buddha body, the buddha mind. It is called the clothing of emancipation, the robe of the field of happiness, the robe of no form, the unsurpassable robe, the robe of patience, the Tathāgata's robe, the robe of great love and great compassion, the robe as a victorious banner, and the robe of supreme, penetrating, perfect enlightenment. You should indeed receive it with utmost respect.

(Dōgen-zenji, **Power of the Robe** 84)

We should know that the *kesa* is the body and mind of Buddha.

(Dōgen-zenji, **Den-e** 143)

Since the *okesa* stores the Buddha's pure teaching and the truth of life, it affects us in different ways. . . . When we assimilate it, the *okesa* works upon us as Buddha-dharma, and we can accept a *okesa* as the Buddha's body and mind, and as a living teacher instead of understanding it through theoretical study. . . . The *okesa* is Buddha's robe, the robe is Buddha's body, Buddha's body is Buddha-dharma and the Buddha-dharma is the *okesa* itself. The same idea is applied to the meaning of *okesa*, *ōryōki* and the *sōdō*. . . . Each of them has a different form, but they are exactly the same teaching. There are three indispensable things in our life: clothing, food, and housing. (Tomoe Katagiri 5-6)

Exploration and use of symbols was an integral part of Dōgen's philosophic and religious method. . . . Often . . . the symbol is said to "point to," "represent" "or "approximate" the symbolized. Rejecting such a dualism, Dōgen contended that "like this" (J. *nyoze*) meant that both "like" and "this" were emptiness and hence thusness. . . . "Like this" did not represent or point to thusness but *was* thusness. Therefore the symbol was the symbolized. (Kim 84-5)

Customs in Japan: Esoteric and Exoteric Practices Mingle in Japan's Religious History

Part of the Japanese culture [since Dōgen's time in the 1200's] has been the integration of Shingon [esoteric Buddhist school] elements into Zen. For instance, the *kirigami*—the oral instructions—and a lot of mudras, and . . . mandala aspects are part of that. There is a whole study of how the *rakusu* and *okesa* is actually a mandala. Besides being a rice field, it's also a *fukuden-e*, a field of merit, a field of blessings. . . . You wear Buddha. . . . Dōgen-zenji thinks of the *okesa* as Buddha's body, transmitted face to face, and teaches Buddha's body by wearing it. (Shōsan Victoria Austin, *Sew R., Class*, 12)

[Exoteric Buddhism has] doctrines openly stated in rational, discursive terms [while Esoteric has] profound mysteries only hinted at or pointed to by subtle signs, symbols, and gestures. (Sources 127)

Dogen advanced an ingenious view of mystery. *Mitsugo* is ordinarily understood as "secret words" or "hidden words," the secrecy or hiddenness of which can be removed by extensive learning, supernatural faculties, and the like. In opposition to this interpretation Dōgen said: "The *mitsu* in question means intimacy (*shimmitsu*) and the absence of distance. . . . [T]he Buddhas and ancestors embrace everything; [likewise] you embrace everything and I embrace everything" [*Shōbōgenzō*, "Mitsugo"]. . . . When a symbol was used in such a nondualistic manner, it was totally intimate with and transparent to the symbolized. . . . Mystery, in Dōgen's view, did not consist of that which was hidden or unknown in darkness or that which would be revealed or made known in the future. Rather, it consisted of the present intimacy, transparency and vividness of thusness, for "nothing throughout the entire universe is concealed" (*henkai-fuzōzō*). Nevertheless, the mystery of emptiness and thusness had to go beyond this: intimacy had to be ever penetrated (*tōka-mitsu*). (Kim 86)

[The following account by the Compiler is drawn from excerpts of Bodiford, Kim, and "Sources" in the *Sew. R.*] The story of esoteric practices in Japan begins before Buddhism arrives in the mid-sixth century. Existing folk customs that collectively became known as Shintō had already been influenced by the earlier arrival of Taoism from China and the Chinese written language. Prince Shōtoku (573-621) became a devout Buddhist, declaring Buddhism the national religion. Both Buddhism and the native spiritual traditions adapted; yet the dynamic tension between the two continued to shape religious practices in Japan through the present. All religions in medieval Japan were subject to political control and to territorial conflicts at both the national and local level. Survival partly depended on local patronage and the perceived efficacy of the practices offered. While all strata of society were more intrigued by esoteric than exoteric practices, people also valued the mountain-dwelling monastics' practice. People believed the monks acquired powers through sitting that insured the success of magical rituals performed to negotiate with the unseen and unknown in order to transform or control future events. Given the monks' arduous effort, personal access to transformative potential through meditation practice and living the precepts seemed impossible. Receiving precepts was seen as powerful. Lay people and local *kami* were ritually given the precepts.

Various Buddhist doctrinal schools developed. Temples rose into prominence as centers of study, then declined, depending upon government patronage. During Dōgen's life (1200-1253), the teaching of original enlightenment (J. *hongaku*) was taught in both esoteric and exoteric schools, and used as a rationale for not practicing meditation, for how could perfection be improved? This simplistic doctrinal interpretation sent him searching for more teachings. Dōgen left Japan for China and in 1225 found his teacher Ju-ching who enabled Dōgen to resolve this great matter thusly: practice expresses enlightenment. "Only when we strive to become Buddhas is Buddha-nature embodied in and through our effort." (Kim 68) Dōgen returned home as Ju-ching's dharma heir and Sōtō lineage holder ('sō' for Huineng, the 6th ancestor, and 'tō' for Tōzan (Bodiford 246)). Although Dōgen wished all Japanese, clergy and lay people, to experience this teaching, he settled on creating a mountain haven, Eihei-ji, to nurture Chinese monastic practices far from government interference.

Within the first century after he died, several of Dōgen successors, notably Keizan, strengthened and popularized the Sōtō School partly by engaging in esoteric practices. Esoteric symbolism is visible in both the historical record of clerical robes and in present-day practices such as funerals. Zen priests cared for abandoned local temples, serving the population in the countryside. They maintained the Shintō practices of *kami* rituals and veneration of the deceased, though increasingly integrated with Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Pairing skillful means and compassion, further connection to the population came through continuing to give the local *kami* and lay population the Buddhist precepts, also considered to have karmic-enhancing effects if administered as “last rites” or postmortem. The tradition of including lay practitioners continues today in Japan. Many choose to receive precepts and participate in sewing groups called *Fukudenkai* (see Riggs) to sew Buddha’s Robe. (Selkirk)

Rice Field

[The field pattern in the robe is in sections.] Each row [J. *jō* — vertical section] is made of one short piece and two long pieces [*rakusu* or five *jō*, one long piece]. The overlapped parts within each row and between the rows are called the *yō*. The top *yō*s always cover the next lower piece and the central rows cover the outer rows. This construction symbolizes the water flowing smoothly in the rice fields, from the center to the right and left sides, and from the top to the bottom.” (Tomoe *Katagiri* 10) [T]he long square [J. *chō*] symbolizes wisdom or realization of truth and the short square [J. *tan*] symbolizes delusion. There are more wisdom squares than delusion squares [only on *okesa*, *rakusu* has the same number] and the wisdom squares separate the delusion squares. (Ian *Kishizawa* 11)


 Symbols/*Kanji*
 (Faure,
Kāṣāya 357)

In another *kirigami* the symbolism of the field, (or, more precisely, of the Sino-Japanese character [J. *kanji*] for ‘field,’) is described as a combination of two swastikas [rotating] clockwise [figure, far left: arms point counterclockwise] and counterclockwise [figure, center: two backwards “z”s cross]: “[O]ne draws a clockwise swastika and a counterclockwise swastika; if one unites them, they form the character ‘field’ [figure, near right]. This is the robe of the formless field of merit.”⁹⁶ (Faure, *Kāṣāya* 357)

[Japan inherited Chinese symbolic thinking along with the written language.] [S]pace, belonging to the earth, was conceived as square, time, belonging to heaven, was conceived as circular. (Faure *Chan Insights* 177) The two swastikas . . . also represent the two *pradaksina*, the clockwise and counterclockwise circumambulations around the stūpa, [[Dōgen:] “[O]ne puts on the *kāshāya* . . . as if it were the [Buddha’s] stūpa (¹¹⁵ “Kesa-kudoku”); [Buddha set down robes, bowl and staff, making a stūpa]], symbolizing the upward movement from *samsāra* to *nirvāna*, and the downward movement from *nirvāna* to *samsāra* — that is, death and rebirth. (Faure, *Kāṣāya* 360-1) ⁴⁵[Formerly in funerary rites] . . . “The Bodhisattva goes in both directions, returning to the world after enlightenment” [now usually clockwise only]. (Faure, *Rhetoric* 197-8)

Svastika. (J. *manji*). Sv-asti means ‘it is well’; the svastika is a very ancient sign of Indian origin, used as an auspicious mark on structures, images or instruments. [A pagoda is a stūpa or reliquary.] (© 1995 Frédéric 72-3, 76) [*Zen Friends*, a Sotoshu Shumuchō publication, indicates temples (pagodas) on maps with one. The symbol’s arms now point counterclockwise since clockwise one adopted by Nazis.]

Swastika: One of the oldest and most complex of [aniconic] symbols . . . used widely by . . . Buddhists. . . . [V]ariouly suggested as the revolving sun; the Pole and the revolution of the stars round it; . . . the revolution of the wheel of life; . . . circling the square and squaring the circle; . . . inbreathing and out breathing. . . . There are two forms of the swastika [representing complements]. . . . Buddhist: the seal of Buddha’s heart; the esoteric doctrine of Buddha. (Cooper 164-6)

Popular images for kesa patches of [the second era of *kesas*, 1185-1573] include images of Buddhist deities and symbols (e.g. swastika, sacred Sanskrit characters, vajra). . . . (Till/Swart 14) ⁹⁶Swastikas are also [found] sewn on the *kāshāya*, at the corners of the eight joints (J. *setsu*). (Faure, *Kāṣāya* 357)

Silk

Neru is, you know — to refine silk . . . we wash it many times so that it can be white enough and soft enough to weave. [T]o refine the material is *neru*. [T]o train in Chinese or Japanese means *neru*. . . . Training is something like this . . . [w]hen you are young, and . . . have a lot of ego [laughs]. . . . if you . . . rub it . . . and wash it, you will be quite soft, pure white silk. [Sometimes we use iron to temper.] (Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi, 69-09-14, 2)

Pine Needle Stitch

Semori (literally, “back protectors”) are motifs stitched on garments to protect the wearer from evil influences. . . . Pine needles (J. *matsuba*). (Marshall 18) [Design used on *rakusu* neckpiece.]

[I]n Japan, pine symbolize[s] . . . pine tree . . . it is always green, and pine tree lives . . . [a] long time, and it doesn’t change its color all year round. So we have some special feeling about pine, and that pine leaf we use in various way[s]. . . . (Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi, 71-06-20, 6)

In Japanese culture there is the concept of ‘*kami*,’ what we would call the genius of a place or guardian spirit of a place, so it’s like a blessing stamp or seal. For instance, on baby things sometimes there’s a little stitch . . . like that. That’s like “Good luck baby!” Or, “Best wishes, baby!” That kind of thing. I think it’s part of the grandmotherly kindness aspect of the ordination process. (Shōsan Victoria Austin, *Sew R., Tassajara* 13) [Paraphrase of text. (Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi, 71-06-20, 6)]

Kami: Ancient Japanese to refer to anything mysterious, wonderful or sacred. . . . At first, the Buddha was thought of as the *kami* of China. . . . [L]ocal *kamis* were made protectors of Buddhism . . . worshipped near Buddhist temples [and] became identified with Buddhist deities. (© 1995 Frédéric 13)

Shintō: Not an established set of dogmas or theology . . . rather the traditional Japanese way of life and beliefs. Meaning ‘the way of the *kami*,’ it was named in the sixth century, after the introduction of Buddhism to Japan in 538, to distinguish it from *Butsudō*, ‘the way of the Buddha.’ (© 1995 Frédéric 13)

The meaning of the document of heritage [J. *kechimyaku*] is this: you understand sun, moon, and stars, and inherit dharma; you attain skin, flesh, bones, and marrow, and inherit dharma; you inherit robe or staff, pine branch or whisk, udumbara flower or brocade robe; you inherit straw sandals or a bamboo staff.

(Dōgen-zenji, *Shiso* 186)

Daiza

The addition of two large . . . panels [patches with or without ties, (J. *daiza*)] . . . represent the bodhisattva (J. *bosatsu*): Samantabhadra (J. *Fugen*), the bodhisattva of benevolence on the right side, and Manjustrī (J. *Monju*) the bodhisattva of wisdom on the left side. . . . (Till/Swart 11)

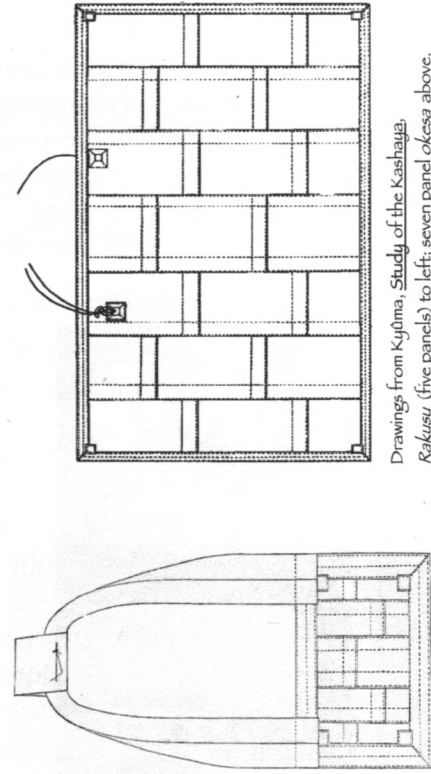
Squares

[Attached to the four corners of a *kesa* and a priest’s *zagu* (cloth bowing mat), are squares (J. *kakujō*).] The squares symbolize the four Guardian Kings (J. *shitennō*) of the Cardinal points of the Buddhist universe, who protect the Dharma from evil. (Till/Swart 11) [A]colytes of Avalokiteśvara . . . represented . . . at the four sides of stūpas. (© 1995 Frédéric 241-247) [The bowing mat at the altar has these squares represented at the four corners; they are to be stepped around.] (Sōjun Mel Weitsman, *Chiden*).

Guardians of the Four Directions [like J. *Shijin*, of Chinese origin], Protectors of Buddhist Law [and] Human Kind. . . . [F]ound standing at the corners of altars. . . . Said to live halfway down the four sides of Mt. Shumisen (Mt. Sumeru or Mt. Meru), the mythical home of Shakyā *Nyorai*. . . . [E]ach lead[s] an army of supernatural creatures to keep the fighting demons (Ashuras) at bay. (Schumacher)

ROBE ELEMENTS TRANSLATED

ROBE PART <u>English</u>	ROBE PART <u>Japanese</u>	MEANING ¹ <u>Literal</u>	SYMBOLISM <u>Other associations/notes</u>
Small robe	<i>Rakusu</i>	<i>Raku</i> —connect; <i>su</i> —lightly filled, (as with straw)	"Cloud-filled" connection (see note). ¹⁰
Panel	<i>Jō</i>	Strip	Permanent, ⁷ staff. (Vertically joined fields).
Long field	<i>Chōjō</i>	Long strip	Wisdom/realization of truth; (open space of <i>chōjō</i>). ³
Short Field	<i>Tanjō</i>	Short Strip	Delusion (open space of <i>tanjō</i>). ³
Open Spaces	<i>Dankyaku</i>	<i>Dan</i> --steps, terraced; <i>kyaku</i> --backward	Rice fields.
Face (inside of frame)	<i>Kagami</i>	Terraces with back and forth stitches	Mirror wisdom--sees things as it is. ⁶ Five skandas/powers. ³
Overlap	<i>Yō</i>	Mirror	Construction is water flowing smoothly in the rice fields (outward and down). ³
Frame	<i>En</i>	Leaf (plant)	Supporting, indirect cause. ⁷
Squares	<i>Kakujō</i>	Pasted square sheet	Four Guardians (J. <i>shintennō</i>). ⁹ Also <i>yorō</i> : <i>jo</i> is help, <i>rō</i> is strengthen. ³
Strap(s)	<i>Sao</i>	Oar or pole for boat	"Birth [life]...is like riding in a boat. You raise the sails and row with the pole." ⁸
Neckpiece	<i>Maneki</i>	A corded robe...cord connects. Generally: an invitation, inviter, leader [takes it] over the head.	Also homonym for traditional cat statuery for good luck and protection.
Stitch (<i>Namu Kie Butsu</i>)	<i>Kyakushi</i>	<i>Kyaku</i> —stepping back; <i>shi</i> —stitch, thrust, stab	Resembles the cat's paw up in the air on the statue.
Envelope	<i>Fukuro</i>	Bag	Back and forth in every stitch. ³
Wooden ring	<i>Dōkan</i>	Way ring	Circle of the Way, continuous practice. ⁸
Patches (for <i>kesa</i> ties)	<i>Daiza</i>	Base, seat	Manjusri and Samantabhadra. ⁹
OTHER REQUISITE:			
Bowing mat (cloth)	<i>Zagu</i>	Sitting tool, equipment	Now only used by priests for bowing.
Center of mat	<i>Tekko</i>	Patch, authentic/old	An old patch needs to be used for a new <i>zagu</i> . ¹



Drawings from Kyōma, *Study of the Kashaya*.
Rakusu (five panels) to left; seven panel *okesa* above.

SOURCES: (See "Works Cited" p. 25-26 for full citations of No. 3-9).

- 1 Kazuaki Tanahashi, personal interview April 8, 2004 by Jean Sellirk.
- 2 *Karaji* (characters) used from Kyōma may be found in *Sewing Reader* (abbr. *Sew R.*).
- 3 Katagiri, Tomoe. *Study of the Okesa, Nijohō-e*, p. 10-12, 108, and non-published notes.
- 4 Kyōma, Echū. *Kesa no Kenkyū* [Study of the Kashaya].
- 5 Shōsan Victoria Austin, *Sew R.*, Class p. 12. (Also other lists of five. "These are our mind states.")
- 6 Sōjun Mel Weitsman, *Sew R.*, Heart Sutra p. 1.
- 7 Sōjun Mel Weitsman, *Sew R.*, *Kannon* p. 2.
- 8 Tanahashi, Kazuaki. "Introduction." *Enlightenment Unfolds*, p. xxviii-xxix.
- 9 Trill, Barry and Swart, Paula (p. 11); also Schumacher, Mark.
- 10 Compiler note: "Clouds" is not expressed literally; *rakusu* received by monk [J. *unsui*, cloud water] connects student to the Buddha ancestors. Considering the lightness of clouds and the literal meaning evoked this phrase.

TEACHING BUDDHA'S ROBE

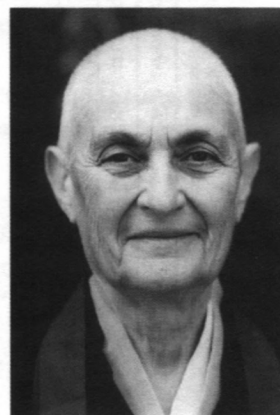
[Here, Zenkei Blanche Hartman relates how she became the sewing tradition lineage holder.]
[Yoshida-rōshi, when visiting her American student in the U.S.A.] talked very enthusiastically to Suzuki-rōshi about the practice of sewing Buddha's robe and encouraged him to do more *Jukai* [*Zaike Tokudo*]. Up until then he had not done *Jukai* much. . . . He had ordained a few monks by that time [*Shukke Tokudo*]. . . . She came back [with her translator/assistant in 1971], and she and Katagiri-rōshi's wife Tomoe-san, and Suzuki-rōshi's wife [Mitsu] . . . taught us to sew Buddha's robe.



Kasai Jōshin-san

(Standing with
Zenkei Blanche Hartman.)

I myself didn't know how to sew. [Blanche became a mother, but trained as a scientist, also working as a mechanic during WWII.] I was quite an ardent feminist. And I was terribly excited about there being a woman *rōshi*. I arranged to take my vacation and be a guest student at Zen Center while this woman *rōshi* was there. . . . It turns out she was teaching sewing! [laughs at the irony]. So what I did was study sewing with her while she was here and she lectured to us about Buddha's robe. [Yoshida-rōshi was not able to return, so Suzuki-rōshi asked] Virginia Baker [wife of the next abbot], to study with Kasai Jōshin-san who was a disciple of Kōdō Sawaki-rōshi.



**Zenkei
Blanche Hartman**

[Jōshin-san] started coming over here every winter and helping us to sew. I sewed my *rakusu* with her. When I finished my *rakusu* [at Tassajara] she told me to go get it, and she . . . went with me to the abbot's [then Richard Baker's] cabin. [They] had this long harangue in Japanese, and when we came out of there I was Jōshin-san's assistant.

She chose me not because I sewed well because I don't. It was because I understood the construction. . . . I understood perpendicular, parallel, the importance of measurement. . . . And she figured she could teach someone who understood how the pieces went together, how to sew.

I was caught up in Jōshin-san's enthusiasm. . . . [T]his was her faith: "Every *kesa* is the whole body of Buddha." She was a person of tremendous faith in Buddha's robe, and that rubbed off on me. She was just a wonderful, devoted person [speaking about her sewing teacher].

She [Jōshin-san] was staying over in one of the pine rooms [at Tassajara] and she would stay up 'til eleven o'clock at night with kerosene lamps. . . . I would say to her, "Jōshin-san, go to bed." And she said, "I can't." And I said, "Why?" She opened the little suitcase that we used for carrying sewing things and she took out some incomplete *rakus* that had been left from the time that people had sewed with Yoshida-rōshi. And although again, though she didn't speak English, what I got was, "That's why I can't! And that's why! And that's why! [J.] *Damme des! Damme des!* [which means] That's bad! That's bad! No incomplete Buddha robes!" She was very exercised. That's when I said, "I promise you, these will be completed!" [along with seven *kesas*, about which Blanche says:] It was out of that promise that my practice of sewing teaching came, it was out of my promise to Jōshin-san, that I would complete what she had started. (Zenkei Blanche Hartman, *Sew R.*, Tassajara, 1-4)



Kyakushi (NKB) Stitching Chant

Namu kie butsu

"I take refuge in Buddha"

"Namu" means "homage"

"ki" means "to plunge in"

"e" means "to rely on"

[B]e concentrated on every stitch . . . as you are concentrated on your breathing. "Concentration," we say, but that is not actually [the] point. Actual point is — real point is to become one with what you do — to become one with your practice. . . .

[Y]ou should try to be concentrated . . . on each stitch, and someday you will understand what does it mean. Not immediately [laughs]. (Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi, 71-06-20, 3)

Immanent in the *kyakushi* stitch is the practice and teaching of "*ekō benshō*,"

"Just turn your light inward and reflect."

(Senryū Kamatani-rōshi 12)

Namu Kie Butsu

Original calligraphy by Hoitsu Suzuki.

(Wallhanging in San Francisco Zen Center Sewing Room.)

"*Namu*" . . . means "returning to the true life of the self" or "the self which is one with the universe." (Kōshō Uchiyama-rōshi 118)

[A]nother way of expressing that feeling [of "Homage to Buddha" is] . . . "at one with." Not "Buddha is over there and I'm here;" but "one with Buddha." (Sōjun Mel Weitsman, *Sew R.*, *Kannon* 1)

Sewing Buddhist garments [J. *Saibō*]. . . . The tiny stitches required for making a *rakusu* are seen as an expression of the commitment one has to the dharma; thus, to offer a *rakusu* as a gift is a highly symbolic gesture. . . . [A]ll nuns learn to sew tiny stitches in straight lines. The Abbess, Aoyama, frequently reminds them that this is same way one follows the path of Buddhism — taking tiny steps in a straight line of pure concentration on the Dharma. In this way, sewing is practice. (Arai 113)

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[W]hen Zen Master Somitsu was sewing . . . Master Tozan asked, "What are you doing?" Master Somitsu said, "I'm sewing." Master Tozan said, "How is your sewing?" Master Somitsu said, "In sewing, almost every stitch is the same." Master Tozan said, "Even though we have been traveling together for twenty years, is this all you can say, doesn't anything else come into it?" And Master Somitsu said, "What do you think, Acharya?" ("Acharya" means great teacher or venerable.) And Master Tozan said, "The whole earth seems to burst into flames." (Jiko Linda Cutts, *Sew R.* 42)

Practice

Eshun Yoshida-rōshi was abbess of a women's monastery (J. *nisō-dō*) in [Tsushima-shi, a suburb of] Nagoya, called Kaizenji. The practice there was if you went to be ordained you sat *seiza* on the *tatami* in the Buddha Hall, and you sewed an *okesa*, and when you finished, you were ordained. So, you sewed an *okesa* in about eight or ten days. You went in, you made three prostrations, and you sewed, sitting *seiza* on the *tatami*. (Zenkei Blanche Hartman, *Sew R.*, Tassjara, 1)

[U]nder Eshun Yoshida-rōshi . . . at the beginning of each sewing session, we light a candle and offer incense on the altar. Then we bow in front of the altar three times. . . . After sewing, we again bow three times. (Tomoe Katagiri 12) [After the three bows, all present face each other and bow once.]

[W]hen sewing a *okesa*, it is best to do so in a specific length of time. If one starts making an *okesa*, one often has a tendency to become insistent and thoughtless because of the desire to finish it as soon as possible and to ignore other tasks or duties which one has to carry out. One should try one's best [make the effort] to do it within the time permitted . . . not be neglectful or misunderstand that "I do not have to hurry or I do not have the time now." (Senryū Kamatani-rōshi 13)

One of the instructions for sewing the *rakusu* is to say a refuge silently with each stitch. . . . "I take refuge in Buddha"; another stitch, "I take refuge in Dharma" [*Namu kie hō*]; another stitch, "I take refuge in Sangha" [*Namu kie sō*]. [Optional to only repeating "Namu Kie Butsu."] [This is the first verse of the "Three Refuges" chant (J. *Sankie mon*). (Sōtōshu 132)] Doing this brings the refuges to the breath, and the breath to the sewing. . . . Sewing is itself a meditation practice which unifies body, breath, and mind. Through the sewing and chanting, we embody the refuges, we bring Buddha's teaching into our bodies. I think this is the first initiation. (Taitaku Pat Phelan, *Sew R.* 5)

If you understand how to — how to practice *zazen*, and how to make *okesa*, how to wear *okesa*, then you may find out the similarity . . . not only similar but also it is the expression — two ways of expression of our buddha-nature. (Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi, 71-06-06, 2)

Each student sews their robe [by hand] with help, in a way that has been passed down through the ages. . . . [T]he effort is for each stitch to be just about the same. With a presence and clarity and attention to detail, stitch after stitch after breath after vow after stitch after vow. . . . And each stitch, each breath . . . is completely fresh, is completely unmanifested until stitch, stitch, breath. . . . [E]ach stitch is almost the same and the earth bursts into flames with each moment. . . . Each moment is right in the middle of the fullness of our life, the heat, the massive fire. It may seem, with our karmic life . . . with our conditioning, that the next moment is predetermined. . . . But . . . our life . . . at each moment is completely, utterly, free. (Jiko Linda Cutts, *Sew R.* 42-43)

Three Nyohōs

The *okesa* is made following three important fundamental rules of Buddha's teaching concerning the material, color and size. When we make a *okesa* following these three *nyohōs* the *okesa* becomes *nyohō-e*. For a disciple of Buddha, these three *nyohōs* are contained not only in the *okesa*, but also in every aspect of practice. These three *nyohōs* are the basic attitude toward life. (Tomoe Katagiri 6)

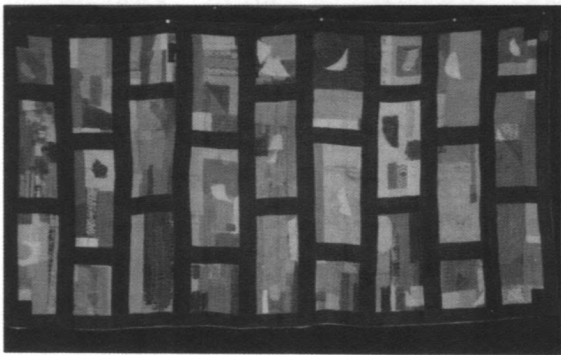
Tai of Nyohō — Rule of Material

The true meaning of *funzō* [Skt. *pāmsūla*] is 'sweepings.' *Funzō-e* is the *okesa* made from cast-off rags that were collected from garbage and from the streets. . . . Nobody can create passion toward it, because there is no value or quality to measure. If people had any attachment to it, they would not have discarded it as garbage. (Senryū Kamatani-rōshi 7)

Becoming attached to the material is to destroy the *kesa*. (Dōgen-zenji, *Den-e* 144)

[T]he material which usual person throw[s] away, we pick up and make *okesa*. . . . Whether it is dirty or not dirty is not the point. The material which people [have] thrown away could be our *okesa*. . . . [Dōgen] talks about this spirit. . . . You could understand only by practice. Only if you understand what is *zazen* you will understand this point. . . . *Zazen* is not sleepy *zazen* or drowsy *zazen* or good *zazen*. [When] you are free from the idea of good *zazen* or bad *zazen* or sleepy *zazen*, then. . . . you have right understanding of *zazen*. . . . Whatever you wear, that is *okesa*. (2-3) [Dōgen] says, in his book, “Sometime you can use new material. Don’t be caught by new material or old material or beautiful or not beautiful.” (6) So when we see things-as-it-is then any material can be robe. . . . [T]o buy new material and cut without using whole of material is to put emphasis on non-attachment: to destroy or get rid of or to be free from our human tendency which will create problem for us. . . . Human nature is good, but because of one weak point, it doesn’t work. . . . [I]f we take care of that point in some way. . . . any material can be robe. . . . [T]his point, which we call, sometime, “attachment” . . . that is our enemy, maybe, which does not exist, but we create because of idleness. Because we do not work hard enough, we create this problem. Okay? (7)

(Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi, 71-06-20)



Nine panel *funzō-e okesa* of Jiun Onkō, Kōki-ji.
Photo by Echū Kyūma-rōshi, with permission.

[Dōgen wrote about the difficulty of following this practice:] In today’s Japan [13th century], there are no such discarded materials. Even when one looks for them, one cannot find any. . . . Therefore we have to use the pure materials given to us by donors. . . . Such discarded materials are neither made of silk nor of cotton; they are not made of gold, silver, pearls, jewels, crepe, muslin, brocade, or embroidery. They are merely discarded materials. (Faure, *Kāshāya* 347-8)

Ten types of rags:

chewed on by an ox
scorched by fire
soiled by childbirth
left at a graveyard
discarded by a king’s officers

gnawed by rats
soiled by menstruation
offered at a shrine
offered in petitional prayer
brought back from a funeral
(Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi, 71-06-20, 2)

[Suzuki-rōshi speaks of why he has not always supported sewing practice. He compares the present day when students have the luxury of time for sewing to the Heian period (794-1185 c.e.) in which the aristocracy mostly sewed and devoted even more time to sewing by bowing many times between stitches. In the next period, the Kamakura, practice was opened to “city people” who did not have the luxury of time. Suzuki-rōshi appears to be speaking about the trade-offs and benefits of being able to afford new materials. Collecting old materials can take a long time, but students in U.S.A. must spend time working in order to have a home. The essence of the sewing practice can be easier to teach with new fabric and until learned, harder with old material. Be aware that having luxury can be a disadvantage — he inquires how might we be Buddhists in the same way as many others in the world who are without the luxury of time even to practice because] “In poor country, even though you want to find out some old material, you cannot find, because they use it [laughs]. You see? . . . “Don’t be too idealistic or too luxurious [laughs], okay?” (Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi, 71-06-20, 10-12)

[There are two streams. . . . One is the *funzō-e* or ascetic stream — torn pieces of discarded cloth. The other stream is the *sogyari-e* characterized by] Mahapajapati wishing to adorn the Buddha with a robe that matches his dignity and accomplishments, and presenting him with a wool *okesa* shot through with gold, which he accepted and wore. (Shōsan Victoria Austin, *Sew R., Class 13*)

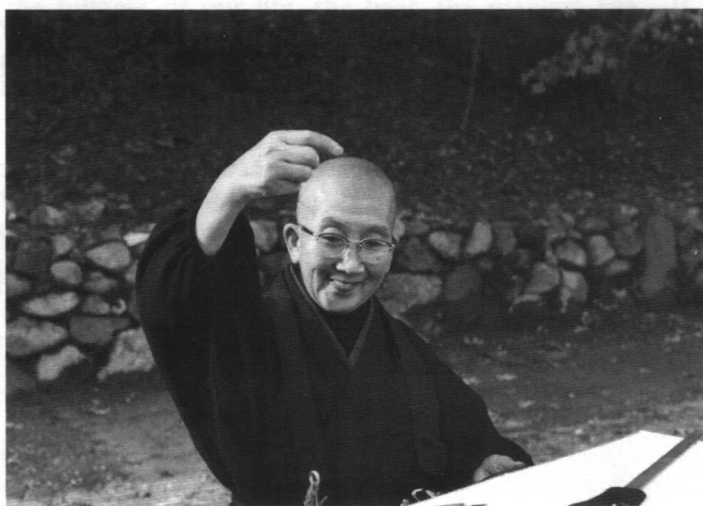
[Until Physician Givaka attended the Buddha, only pamsūlaka [J. *funzō*] robes worn. Givaka asked permission to give Buddha “siveyyaka” cloth (name also for cloth used to veil the dead) — the “most excellent . . . the most precious, and the noblest.” Also for the Bhikkus to be allowed robes of cloth given by lay people (Pali, *kathina*), or “lay robes”.] (*Vinaya*, Mahāvagga VIII, Chap. 1, 190-5)

[After this event, many lay people expressed their support with gifts of different cloth. The monks encountered many problems and asked seemingly endless questions of the Buddha about how to manage acceptance, preparation, storage and distribution of the cloth. The Buddha responded with fair and practical guidance — skillful means (Skt. *upāya*).] (*Vinaya*, Mahāvagga VIII, 199-207)

Some might object to using silk for such a purpose [cleaning up excrement], but that is to misunderstand the Buddhist Way. If one does not like silk, they will not like other kinds of cloth. What is the reason for disliking silk? It is ludicrous to object to killing the cocoons to make silk; isn't cloth a living thing also? The distinction between animate and inanimate is the territory of ordinary people; if such a viewpoint is not abandoned, how can we know the Buddhist *kesa*?

(Dōgen-zenji, *Den-e* 144)

The *tenjō* ceremony is [traditionally] necessary [but no longer performed] when the *okesa* is made from new fabric [instead of intrinsically pure, dyed *funzō-e*]. . . . “*Ten*” mean “dot or stain” and “*jō*” means “purity or chastity.” *Tenjō* means to reform an ordinary sense of value about clothing, food, and housing and to be free of attachment to it. *Tenjō* is the ceremony of purification in which small dotted stains are put on the *okesa* or *zagu* [bowing mat]. It is said in *Study of the Kesa* by Kōdō Sawaki-rōshi that in the beginning “small dots were put on Buddhist belongings as a mark to distinguish them from the other monks’ belongings.” This changed into the meaning of purifying. . . . [W]e should reflect on how to use the new material with a modest attitude so as not to become self-indulgent. . . . [T]he *tenjō* ceremony symbolizes that the material is no longer new. (Tomoe Katagiri 9)



“Sew with heart!” says Jōshin-san.

Ryō of Nyohō — Rule of Size

To wear an *okesa* practically in the proper way and in a well-kept manner, the *okesa* was made according to individual size through individual body measurements . . . [using *chūryō* measurement, or elbow point to finger-tip; three *chūryō* tall, five *chūryō* side-to-side]. (Tomoe Katagiri 9-10)

Shiki of Nyohō — Rule of Color

The color that conforms to the *okesa* is modest and does not create a feeling of luxury, greed or jealousy in the human mind. At the same time this modest color shows the difference between disciples of the Buddha and [others]. The point is to refrain from using people's favorite colors, such as bright colors, because then our life is free from greed, anger and self-delusion. For this purpose, the *okesa* material is dyed to an impure or blended color. A primary color and two or more different colors are blended to create a dull color that is hard to define. (Tomoe Katagiri 8)

Roughly speaking, blended colors are grouped into three: a blueish group, a reddish group and a yellowish group. The blueish group consists of a pine leaf-like color (dark green), greenish rust and blueish black. In the "Kesa-kudoku," Dōgen-zenji says that the *okesa* the patriarchs transmitted from Bodhidharma was blueish black. . . . Senryū Kamatani-rōshi says . . . the *okesa* Dōgen-zenji received from Nyōjō-zenji was also the same color, blueish black. (Tomoe Katagiri 8)

Dōgen-zenji says in the "Kesa-kudoku" that Shakyamuni Buddha always wore a reddish black *okesa*. . . . [T]he "reddish-black" color is called *keśaya* in Sanskrit, and *okesa* in Japanese. . . . [Senryū] Kamatani-rōshi says . . . in India monks dyed their *okesa* material into reddish black using the juice made from the bark and nuts of the *gandha* tree. . . . [D]yeing the cloth into the *okesa* color means throwing one's body, mind and thought into the Buddha-dharma. Tomoe Katagiri 8-9)

Colors in Use Today

The black is particularly for monks-in-training, for priests-in-training. The ordination which we call *Shukke Tokudō*, some teachers call being ordained as a "priest-in-training" because a full monk, a fully ordained priest in this tradition is someone who's received Dharma transmission and then they start wearing brown [or this "conveys the right to wear colored" (*Zen Friends*, No. 4-2005, p. 24)] robes instead of black. [Black robes are] sort of training robes. [The color for Lay Ordination is blue. The color for Lay Teacher Recognition is green. Other traditions and lineages may use different colors or techniques of construction not always in use, though sometimes worn, in the lineage of Suzuki-rōshi.] (Zenkei Blanche Hartman, *Sew R.*, Tassajara 10).

Other Robes

[Clothing is classified] as *kesa* [Buddha's Robe] and *koromo* (Buddhist priest's robe) . . . designed by sewing together an upper garment (*benzan*) and a lower garment (*kunsu*). (Tsūgen Narasaki-rōshi, 61)

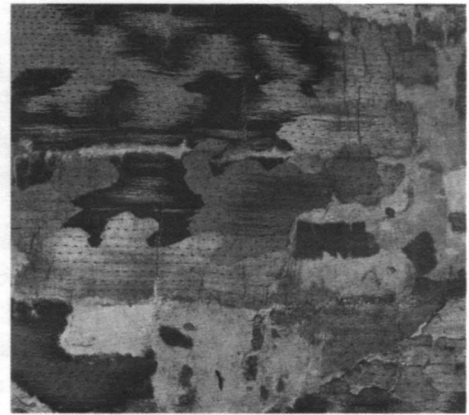
[Zenkei Blanche Hartman explains the difference between *koromo* and sitting robe.] You'll notice that [priests] . . . they take off this robe [*koromo*] and put on a work robe ["sitting robe," also used by lay students]. . . . Someone asked [Tenshin Reb Anderson] once, "What's the difference between a *koromo* and a sitting robe?" and he said, "A *koromo* is a more interesting cloth event." . . . [W]hen you're standing in *shashu*, the sleeve goes down to your hem and [the sitting robe sleeve] doesn't, and it also goes out from the end of your hand further. It's really made for ceremonial purposes. . . . (Zenkei Blanche Hartman, *Sew R.*, Tassajara 12)

[Although Suzuki-rōshi did not wear robes as worn today, he knew the teachers who had rekindled the tradition (see Lineage, p. 2) and appreciated their sincere practice.] (Shunryū Suzuki-rōshi, 71-06-06, 4)

KESA EVOLUTION IN JAPAN

[The first era of *kesa* development took place from 552 until 1185. This era covers three periods (Asuka (552-645), Nara (645-794) and Heian (794-1185).] (Till/Swart 13) [*Kesas* extant from this period are likely to have come from China and been studied by Kōdō Sawaki-rōshi in Nara at Hōryū-ji.] (Shōsan Victoria Austin, *Sew R., Class 6*)

[Image to right, *tōyama-gesa* silk, c.e. 806.] *Shino* . . . a stitching process wherein small, irregularly shaped pieces of cloth are overlapped and joined together. *Kokushi*, type of tapestry weave (J. *tsuzure ori*, literally, “patches weave”) . . . simulates . . . *shino*. (Kennedy, 69-71, 80)



Reproduced with permission from *Nihon no Bijutsu*, #12, Shibun-do, Tokyo, 1967, p. 94.

One of the earliest surviving examples of *kesa* in Japan is a robe presumably worn by Prince Shōtoku (573-621). . . . The robe is made from irregularly shaped pieces of finely woven silk . . . overlapped and layered in a textile collage [of two to seven layers] . . . integrated both structurally and visually by row upon row of finely spaced vertical running stitch [“rain” in twin, parallel threads], minutely executed. Not only are the colors soft but [worn away cloth] partially reveals the [layers below and] . . . call to mind indistinctness of faraway mountains wreathed in ever-changing clouds, fogs and mists . . . *tōyama-gesa* [compound of *kesa*], the *kesa* of Distant Mountains. [See detail p. 24, top right] (Lyman 27-9)

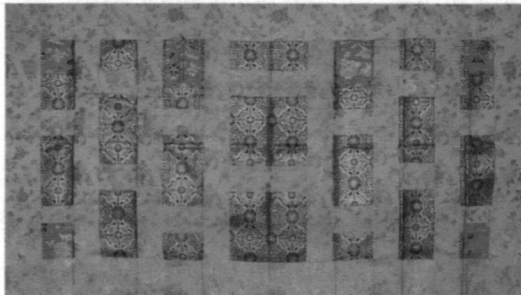


The second era is 1185 to 1573, covering the Kamakura (1185-1333), Nanbokucho (1333-1392) and Muromachi (1392-1573) periods. Different fabrics were used for the columns and panels than for the background [see below left] — these were also Chinese in origin, particularly the fabric, but differed from the previous era in structure and design. The transition from pāmsūla [J. *funzō*] to brocade had its origins in patronage in China by the aristocracy. (Till/Swart 12-16)

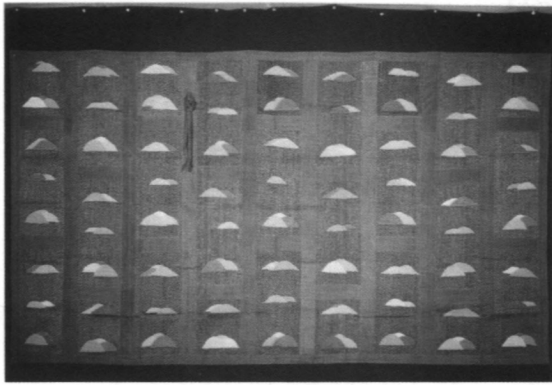
[One side of the columns (or lattice)] was left unstitched at intervals [see image, left] . . . another reference to the ragged garments of the Buddha. (Lyman 32)

Three Images
[above, right].
(Till/Swart)

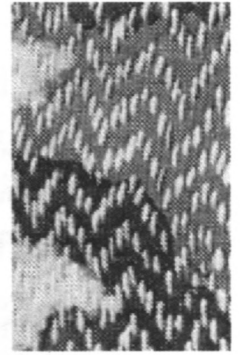
[Note: near
right, colors
are used to
show the two
patches and
four squares.]



[The third period, 1573-1912 and into the present covers the Momoyama (1573-1615), Edo (1615-1868) and Meiji (1868-1912). Japan became more isolationist and trade declined, benefitting Japanese textile development. However, the complex and richly decorated fabrics produced a response. Despite the decline in fabric quality due to re-opening of trade, donated and very ornate fabric would be used from the aristocracy [see above, right]. A Shingon monk, Jiun Onkō (1718-1804), studied older methods and advocated a return to the use of *funzō-e*. Forty of these robes are still at Kōki-ji [and were probably studied by Kōdō Sawaki-rōshi]. Like a Japanese screen, the *kesa* might have an entire pictorial scene woven into the fabric.] (Till/Swart 13-16)



The Edo period produced *funzō-e* that exhibited a literal translation of the *tōyama-gesa* [without the layers, using] segregated design shapes arranged upon a background [see photo to left]. . . and [though not visible, may imitate the twill-like effect of the stitching]. [See image to right, 100% scale] (Lyman 38)



Nine-panel *funzō-e okesa* of Sawaki-rōshi [left].
Photo by Echū Kyūma-rōshi, with permission.

Photo by Ron Granich,
with permission.

We . . . wear the history of Buddhism. The *okesa* is Indian, the *koromo* is Chinese, the *kimono* is Japanese. (Zenkei Blanche Hartman, *Sew R.*, Tassajara 12)

[A traveler monk of the conservative Vinaya School] . . . named I-ting went from China to India [about 680] . . . to find out how monks and nuns dressed, because he was afraid that the Chinese monks weren't doing it right. . . . The Chinese monks were wearing robes with sleeves . . . [and he feared] the Dharma was degenerating. . . . [He reported what he found but] it didn't actually change what Chinese monks were doing. For instance, the temperature in China was much, much colder than it ever gets in India. . . . [I]n China and Japan, the *okesa* evolved to be outer garments instead of layers of garments. . . . A lot of what we know about what people actually did comes to us from that particular monk [although the accuracy of his perceptions is unknown]. [See Works Cited, I-ting] (Shōsan Victoria Austin, *Sew R.*, Class 3-4)

JAPANESE TRADITIONAL MEASUREMENTS

The traditional system of weights and measures is called *shakkan-ho*, from *shaku*, a unit of length, and *kan*, a unit of weight. Japan's historic measure of length, called the *kanejaku*, or square, originated in China. It was designated as Japan's official measure in 701 by the "Taiho Code." ^{"Works Cited" A}

Sashi-gane, which is a try square, ["L" square] is an essential tool to mark lines and check the accuracy of a 90-degree corner. Different names . . . [include] *kane-jyaku*. ^{"Works Cited" B}

"*Shaku*" a Japanese word meaning "measure" or "scale," also used for several traditional units in Japan. ^{"Works Cited" C}

There are two *shaku* systems in common use in Japan. [One is] called "*kane shaku*" [*kane* means metal] is used for everything except kimono and cloth. [The other] called "*kujira shaku*" is about 20% longer than the other one, is used exclusively for kimono and cloth and every *wasai* (Japanese seamstress) knows it internally. ^{"Works Cited" D} "*Kujira*" means "whale" (hence *kujirajaku* is a "whale *shaku*") because rulers for measuring cloth were made from whale whiskers. . . . In Japan, in the 18th–20th centuries, [*kujira shaku sun* or 10 *bu* is] a unit of length used with cloth, [and measures] approximately . . . (3.79 cm or 1.49 inches). ^{"Works Cited" E}

Equivalents

1 <i>bu</i>	=	3.03 mm	<u><i>Kane Shaku System</i></u>
10 <i>bu</i>	= 1 <i>sun</i>	= 3.03 cm	3 <i>bu</i> = 9.09 mm
10 <i>sun</i>	= 1 <i>shaku</i>	= 30.03 cm	
6 <i>shaku</i>	= 1 <i>ken</i>	= 1.82 m	<u><i>Kujira Shaku System</i></u>
10 <i>shaku</i>	= 1 <i>jo</i>	= 3.03 m	3 <i>bu</i> = 11.37 mm

One *bu* (either system), is the space between the centers of two NKB stitches.

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JAPANESE TRADITIONAL MEASUREMENTS

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- D. <http://www.navaching.com/shaku/shaktwo.html> (Accessed, Fall 2003). Reproduced by permission.
- E. http://www.sizes.com/units/kujira_shaku_sun.htm (Accessed, Fall 2003). Reproduced by permission.

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Wearing — When and How

All sittings, ceremonies and sangha occasions held at Zen Temples.

Away from the Temple in outside world, if appropriate.

Wear over clean clothes, with nothing over it and something underneath—not worn against bare skin.

During all services, bow holding the *rakusu* to the body so it does not touch the ground.

Not worn where it could become physically or metaphorically dirty (garden work, bathroom, etc.).

Before entering the bathroom, remove and fold *rakusu*, then situate on an altar outside the bathroom.

If no altar, hang it up on provided peg or hook outside door; otherwise on the doorknob outside bathroom.

Follow local customs—if you have a question, ask the person who gave you the precepts.

Wearing Forms

Morning zazen (in zendo)

Bring *rakusu* in its case (envelope) in the morning, and position in front of you as you sit (on knee if in chair).

Depending on the zendo, this is either on the zabuton or on wood between yourself and the wall.

At temple's signal (e.g. third round of han or bell's "clunk"/chant begins), set case on your head and be in gassho.

After the robe chant, remove from case and place around neck.

Other times of the day

First time each day:

Set *rakusu* (in case) on top of your head, then with hands in gassho recite the robe chant silently.

Alternately and/or other times: Set *rakusu* (in case) on top of your head, bow . . . remove *rakusu* from head . . . and/or

Touch it to your forehead before or after remove from case, then place around neck.

During Sittings

Throughout the day: during zendo meals but not while working.

For zendo serving, wear normally or fasten a belt over *rakusu* so it does not dangle into your serving space.

Removing

After last period of zazen (sitting or daily), remove *rakusu*, fold carefully . . . then . . .

Touch to forehead before or after slide into envelope, and bow.

Return *rakusu* to the space where it belongs for the night.

Where to Keep the *Rakusu*

Keep on altar or a respectful, high place.

Do not set anything on top of it. Pack on top/one side of bag.

Take care that it does not touch the ground.

Cleaning and Care of the *Rakusu*

Be careful not to get it dirty—ink fades with washing.

Sponge off spills immediately.

See Dōgen's Kesakudoku for formal, traditional manner of cleaning (except always use cool water).

Short Form: Pre-shrunk fabrics: Light incense, then wash gently (soak only) in cool, scented water with a little mild soap.

Rinse many times in cool water. Hang in a clean, high place over sheet to dry. Iron, using a pressing cloth.

Not pre-shrunk (silk, linen, or unwashed cotton): Take to drycleaners.

Explain that this is a religious robe and needs to be cleaned separately, without harsh agents.

After cleaning and before wearing:

Set on altar or table (high place). Light incense, scatter petals, circumambulate clockwise 3 times or more.

Full bows (3 or 6 or 9). Kneel (chokei) with hands in gassho, *rakusu* set on head. Recite robe chant.

If mending becomes necessary, repair with thread saved from sewing. See a sewing teacher if assistance is required.

A needle is one of the eight requisite possessions of a monk.

Meghiya Sutta: This sutta speaks of wearing robes and "walking to and fro." When wearing robe, be mindful of demeanor; moving without haste.

Carry *Rakusu* Respectfully: Use both hands (if free). Carry at eye level in the zendo; outside, heart level. When bowing, hold at same level.

"To wear *akesa* without mending it is the same as not wearing it at all.

Ejo-zenji asked Dōgen-zenji about what to do with wornout *kesas* in the 'Zuimonki.' [Also, see p. 44 in Dōgen, Zuimonki.]

'If a monk refuses to throw away an old, mended robe, it looks as though he is coveting it. If he throws away an old robe and acquires a new one, he seems to be attached to the new. Both views are wrong. What attitude should one take?'

Dōgen-zenji answered, 'If you can free yourself from both covetousness and attachment, neither will be wrong. Wouldn't it be better, though, to mend a torn robe and use it for a long time rather than long for a new one?'" (from Study of the Okesa, Tomoe Katagiri 23)

Removing/Folding *Rakusu* (after wearing)*

(as taught by Sōjun Mel Weitsman)

Remove (*Figure 1*)

- 1a. Pinch each lower corner between thumb and forefinger of each hand.
- 1b. Move corners away from you, folding *rakusu* by bringing corners together.
- 1c. Hold both corners with one hand by continuing to hold right corner between right thumb/forefinger, the other corner between right forefinger and middle finger (forefinger is in between corners).
- 1d. Mirror the hold with left hand above right:
(left corner between left thumb/forefinger . . . as above).
- 1e. Slide left thumb/finger(s) up, bringing the sides together, stop at upper corners.
- 1f. Hold upper corners with left thumb/finger(s), and let go with right hand.
- 1g. Hook right thumb under right straps and slide upwards to neckpiece.
Use fingers to keep straps flat against thumb as straps start to twist and to also flip neckpiece up as thumb moves to center of neckpiece.
- 1h. Right thumb stays hooked under neckpiece while rotating entire *rakusu* COUNTERCLOCKWISE until neckpiece is over right shoulder AND WHILE rotating left hand upwards and backwards until over left shoulder.
- 1i. Lift *rakusu* over head, still holding the neckpiece with the right hand and top corners with the left. *Rakusu* is horizontal.
- 1j. Lower left hand, moving straps from horizontal to vertical, until in same position as *Figure 2* (except right thumb still holds neckpiece center).

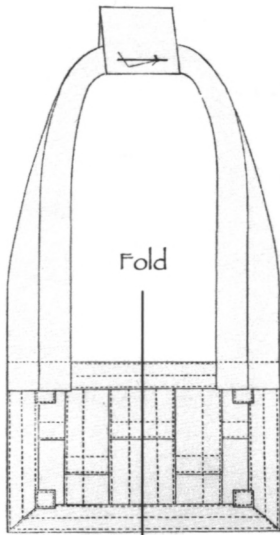


Fig. 1

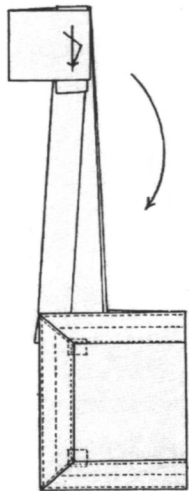


Fig. 2

Fold (*Figures 2-6*)

2. In the direction of the arrow on *Figure 2*, bring right hand towards you . . .
3. . . . and down until the straps and neckpiece look like *Figure 3*.
4. In the direction of the arrow on *Figure 4*, bring right hand up and away from you, folding straps to fit, like *Figure 4*.
Alternately, keep straps parallel to edge and fold to angle neckpiece.
5. Slip folded *rakusu* into envelope as in *Figure 5*. Check corners are flat.
Hold only frame, avoid handling silk.
Alternately, insert frame edges first: palm up, fingers folded over frame (*rakusu* rests on forearm), guide *rakusu* into envelope.
6. Fold flap, *Figure 6*.

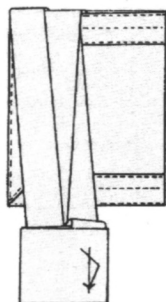


Fig. 3

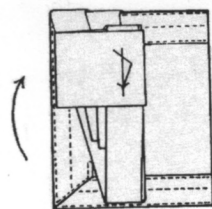


Fig. 4

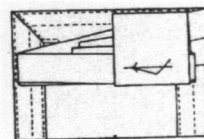


Fig. 5



Fig. 6

* May reverse "right/left" if lefthanded.

Drawings from Kyūma, *Study of the Kashaya*.

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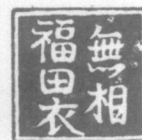
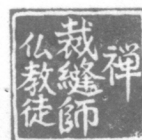
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