

# FOREWORD BY UCHIYAMA KOSHO ROSHI

My teacher, Sawaki Kōdō-roshi, always said, “Put on the okesa and do zazen—that’s all!”

In these words, I find the “that’s all” part particularly profound. The practice of “Put on the okesa and do zazen” contains the entirety of the buddhadharma; there is no need to add or say anything more, not to mention any need to seek after fame or fortune. Just the practice of “Put on the okesa and do zazen” itself is the perfect manifestation of the self, the practice of ultimate peace.

In other words, the practice of buddhadharma is not about accumulating something in order to finally get enlightened or go to some heavenly realm. Rather, it is to become buddha by simply practicing, right at this moment, the Buddha’s practice, which is already completed.

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For us, as the Buddha’s disciples, this is the point: that just as zazen itself is the perfected practice-buddha<sup>1</sup>, wearing the okesa is itself also the perfected practice-buddha.

However, if I only say, “Put on the okesa and do zazen, that’s all” and explain no further, it may sound too far removed from ordinary thinking. It can’t be good if it is perceived as an indulgence or as complacency. So for now, setting aside zazen, let me add a few words as about the okesa, as a kind of “snake’s foot”

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<sup>1</sup> “Practice-buddha” (行仏, *gyobutsu*), from Dogen’s *Shobogenzo Gyobutsu Igi*, “Dignified Conduct of Practice-Buddha,” refers to the teaching that practice based on the Buddha’s teachings is itself buddha.

( Jp.蛇足dasoku, meaning something superfluous). I only hope that adding a foot won't turn the snake into something different.

Suppose someone says, “I will never become angry.” We may be impressed in the moment, but if we hear the reason as “...because if I get angry, it's my loss,” then that does not feel so impressive anymore—the reason the person doesn't get angry is merely a greedy mind.

One of the ten major precepts in Buddhism is “not to give way to anger.” This precept is about the fact that, in the world of truth, there is nothing with which to be angry.

Resting on this truth, we vow to live our religious life under the guidance of this precept. Not getting angry out of greed cannot be about living our religious life, even if there truly is no anger. In this regard, the religious life is solely dependent on one's attitude. Attitude changes everything.

It is same for the okesa. Sawaki-roshi once told me, “Someone said a Buddhist priest and a geisha are not so different because at a precepts ceremony, the priest changes okesa multiple times.” It is true: if priests are not careful, then they might just be showing off. This may sound terrible, but in fact it is possible—all depending on the attitude of the priest.

If such a thing can happen among Buddhist priests, then it must be because the okesa has turned into a costume of the Buddhist priesthood as an occupation. Of course, fundamentally, the priesthood should not be an occupation. Rather, a Buddhist priest should be one who lives an awakened life by leaving behind all kinds of group stupidity<sup>2</sup>. The okesa, then, should be a uniform that symbolizes

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<sup>2</sup> Group stupidity, or *grupuboke* in Japanese: *bokeru* means our minds stop functioning in a normal, wholesome way because of internal or external conditions such as intoxication, disorder, illness, aging, and so on. Sawaki-roshi observes that when people identify with a group or an organization, their mind stops working in a healthy way. Commentary by Shohaku Okumura (*Homeless Kodo*, 2004, p. 36, Wisdom Publications)

“no group stupidity” (Jp. 解脱服 *gedappuku*, a robe of liberation), worn by such homeleavers.

However, even if we have “left home” [to become ordained as a Buddhist priest], there is no doubt that we are still deluded, and it is no easy task to live an awakened life without group stupidities. But it is for this very reason that it is possible for us to practice, that we can be guided and pulled by the okesa by wearing it as the uniform of Buddha’s disciples—a symbol of awakened life without group stupidities. If we practice that way, the okesa is no longer a mere garment we put on but rather a banner of awakening (Jp. 解脱の幢 *gedatsu no hatahoko*) and an amulet of Buddha’s disciples (Jp. 護身符子 *goshinfushi*). The okesa is also the robe of great compassion, the robe of the Tathagata, the Buddha’s Body and Mind. The okesa watches over us, pulling and turning us as Buddha’s disciples. We should never forget that Dogen Zenji wrote *Kesa Kudoku* (“Virtue of Kashaya”) and *Den-e* (“Transmission Robe”) in *Shobogenzo*, specifically emphasizing the practice of a religious life wrapped with the okesa.

Nevertheless, today the okesa has become a mere costume of Buddhist priests, and its design and construction have developed accordingly. The understanding of the okesa has long since been corrupted; the sewing of the okesa has been forgotten. For that very reason, Sawaki-roshi emphasized the original meaning of the okesa as a robe of liberation. At the same time, through his study the Vinaya and his examination of old okesa, he discovered the true way of sewing them, which he then recommended widely to both lay and ordained people.

During Sawaki-roshi’s lifetime, countless numbers of people were inspired by him to sew the authentic robe (Jp. 如法衣 *nyohō-e*<sup>3</sup>). Around the time Sawaki-

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<sup>3</sup> Nyo (如) means ‘such-ness’, ‘thus-ness’. Ho (法) means ‘dharma’, the Buddha’s teachings, or ‘Dharma’, the truth the Buddha was awakened to. ‘e’ means robe. *Nyohoe* means ‘the robe which is made in accordance with the Buddha’s teaching’.

roshi left Tokyo and retired to Antaiji in Kyoto, the seeds of okesa sewing had begun to grow, with fukudenkai<sup>4</sup> (robe-sewing groups) taking shape in Tokyo.

It is inspiring that even after Roshi has passed away, many people have faith in the okesa and are sewing it, encouraging each other. However, if this tradition of nyoho-e sewing is only verbally passed on from one person to another, it could be lost again. Out of that concern, Kyuma Echu embodied Sawaki Roshi's intention; for ten years, he focused on studying and writing down the many details of making the okesa. This book, which explains how to sew the various kinds of nyohō-e, is the result of his diligent effort. Along the way, Kyuma asked Sawaki-roshi questions for clarification, and Roshi offered him various resources and advice. Even toward the end, when Sawaki Roshi was sick in bed, he would read through the manuscript. It is unfortunate that this book was not published while Roshi was still alive.

I am grateful to the publisher, Daihorinkaku, for their decision to publish this work despite the hardships presented by a work containing so many diagrams. And I admire Kyuma's determination to fulfill Sawaki Roshi's will. This book carries an important historical meaning.

It is my hope that many people, through this book, will not only come to understand the meaning of the true okesa but also arouse the aspiration to sew a rakusu as a means of deepening their connection to Buddha's teaching. And may they be even further inspired, through Sawaki-roshi's deep connection with the okesa, to sew an okesa themselves.

Uchiyama Kosho  
Abbot of Antaiji  
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<sup>4</sup> The first Fukudenkai sewing group was started by Yahoko Mizuno on May 9th, 1964. Sawaki Roshi named the group. 'fuku' 福 meaning 'happiness', 'felicity'. The term derives from 'fukutoku' 福德, 'happiness and virtue'. The word 'den' 田 means rice field. The design of kesa came from pattern of rice field.