

BEING MYSELF IN BUDDHIST ROBES

I wear this robe because it symbolizes, in its true sense, the spirit of using material as it is, and the spirit of me being me myself.



If you have the right kind of spirit in your practice, you will not be involved in lazy ideas like how long you have practiced or what kind of practice you do. You will not be so happy to hear the words “Buddhism,” or “Zen,” or “Rinzai way,” or “Soto way.” Those names will bother you.

Some people ask me, “Why do you wear the Buddhist robe all the time? Why do you sit in the same way all the time?”

You may think that we are wearing a special robe, but actually it is not so. Buddha made his robe by collecting various materials from the street,

from graveyards, or from the garbage. After cleaning and purifying them, he sewed the big pieces and small pieces together in a certain way. This pattern of our Buddhist robe is designed to use big and small pieces of material; small pieces can be used for the smaller parts and big ones can be used for the bigger parts.

Because the materials that Buddha used were all old, the colors of the robe are not bright and beautiful, but that does not mean that a brightly colored cloth could not have been used for Shakyamuni Buddha's robe. That would be a wrong understanding. Whatever color it is, it could be a Buddhist robe.

It is our robe only when we forget all about what color it is or what material it is made of. It may be silk, linen, or cotton, but when we use it, it is not silk or cotton or linen, it is just Buddha's robe. What we call "Buddha's robe" is just a robe, just the material. When this material is just this material, it is not any particular material. It is part of the universe.

This is exactly the same as our zazen practice. When you become just you, that is how the practice includes everything. When we let this material be just this material, without saying mine or yours, then this material is for everyone.

We make a robe with this understanding. We do not make a robe just for ourselves; we are making something greater, which will include everything and which is for everyone. The way we make the robe expresses our

practice. Since anyway we need something to wear—especially when it's cold!—it's better to wear something that will express our real understanding and will help people join our practice. That is why we make a robe. If we miss this point, our robes will not be our robes and will not be Buddha's robe. It is Buddha's robe only when we understand this point and when we make it with this spirit.

Each one of you should live in the world with this spirit. Right now you are listening to me, but strictly speaking, you shouldn't listen to me—you should do it yourself. You should be you. You should have your own way of life with this kind of spirit, and in that way each one of you will be a Buddhist. When you force your way on others and think that Buddha's way is the best way, Buddhism cannot be Buddhism. Buddhism is not one of the many ways, and it is not the Japanese way or the American way. It is each person's own way. The only reason that I behave like a Japanese person, doing things the Japanese way, is because I am Japanese. If you really want to make an *okesa* or *rakusu*, it will be Buddha's robe, but if you are imitating Buddha's robe, then it is not Buddha's robe.

If you really want to be a Buddha, or Buddha's disciple, naturally you will make and wear Buddha's robe. That does not mean propagating Buddhism, it just means that you really want to be a Buddhist, that's all. If you really want to be a Buddhist, through and through, then naturally what you say and do will be like what Buddha or Bodhidharma said and did.

Before, I said that if you really become you, you include everything. Right now, I'm saying that if you really want to be a Buddhist, you will naturally want to wear Buddha's robe. This might be confusing, but there is no contradiction. I wear this robe because it symbolizes, in its true sense, the spirit of using material as it is, and the spirit of me being me myself. Because this robe symbolizes that spirit, I wear it. When we wear these robes, there's no contradiction.