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OKESA CEREMONY
Saturday, June 6, 1971
San Francisco

[The tape begins with Tenshin-sensei Reb Anderson reciting the verse attributed by Shākyamuni Buddha, quoted in the fascicle "Kesa-kudoku," in Dōgen-zenji's *Shōbōgenzō*. The translation may have been by Suzuki-rōshi.]

Tenshin-sensei: I will read now a translation of the sūtra we just chanted:

Listen carefully, Chiko Bisshu,¹ to the ten precious virtues intrinsic to the garment of the great field of blessedness. While common clothing encourages the growth of delusion, the Buddha's garment of the dharma, the okesa, is by no means like that.

The okesa enables one, first of all, to achieve the completion of clear conscience. The okesa covers the dishonorable conduct. It is worthy to be called "the field where perpetual blessedness grows."

Secondly, the okesa enables one to rest in the ultimate repose, eliminating discomfort from cold and heat or a poisonous insect with the preserving way-seeking mind.

Thirdly, the okesa enables one to be free from greed in the homeless life of a monk and eradicates the five false views. It directs one's effort towards the right practice.

Fourthly, the okesa enables one to elicit the same blessedness as King Brahmā by paying homage on one's knees to the okesa like a banner woven with gems.

Fifthly, the okesa enables one to enjoy happiness in heavenly and human worlds under no influence of sinfulness, always in the belief that wearing the okesa identifies itself with the worship of a stūpa.

Sixthly, the okesa enables one to realize that as a true monk wears and reveres the okesa, made by the three proper methods and arrangement of its materials, color, and measurement, all his conduct is uncontaminated by upward attraction.

Seventhly, the okesa enables one to realize that all the buddhas admire its virtues and call it the fertile field, because to wear it is the best way to confer benefit on all beings.

Eighthly, the okesa enables one to cultivate the root of the enlightened mind and to practice under the inspiring influence of the okesa.

Ninthly, the okesa enables one to realize that the germ of the religious awakening is like a spring seedling—that it is growing, and the surpassing result of the enlightened mind is like an autumn fruit.

Tenthly, the okesa enables one to be unspoiled by the poisonous arrow of delusion due to wearing the indestructible armor.

¹ Chiko is the Japanese equivalent of the monk's name, Jnānaprabha. *Bisshu* is probably the Japanese equivalent of Sanskrit *bhikshu*, monk. The original term that Dōgen used in *Shōbōgenzō* "Kesa-kudoku" is *biku*.

The Buddha has, as mentioned briefly above, admired the ten precious virtues of the okesa which surpass all description, even if one were to spend an incredible time to describe it.

A dragon with even a thread of the okesa is able to escape the hazard of falling prey to the garuda,² king of birds.

Crossing the sea, carrying the okesa with him, he [a person] is by no means concerned about the danger of dragon, fish, and other devils. Even a thunderbolt or unforeseen disasters, fear and stay away from those who wear the okesa. All demons simply cannot reach a layman who wears the okesa.

When one seeks the life of a homeless monk with this awareness, and wants to be free from worldly desire for the sake of practice, demons' palaces in all the ten directions will shake and collapse. And the Buddha and buddhahood will be revealed.

Suzuki-rōshi: Thank you very much for your [10-15 words obscured by mike noise] ... Yoshida-rōshi.³ I have heard of how important practice is to wear *okesa*. But it is not so easy to meet the occasion to have or to receive *okesa*—especially *okesa* which is made in proper way, you know. It is—you may feel funny if I say "proper," but to transmit teaching properly is not so easy thing.

I don't say we have been neglected the study of *okesa* for long long time. But under the very difficult circumstances, it was not so easy to transmit how to make *okesa*, how to wear *okesa*, and what does it mean to wear *okesa*. What is the relationship between our zazen practice and *okesa*-wearing practice? And what is the relationship between how to make *okesa* and our teaching transmitted from Buddha?

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 of two practice. It is not similar—not only similar but also it is the expression—two ways of expression of our buddha-nature.

The word—words we explain or express the virtue of *okesa* and virtue of our zazen practice maybe, you know, because the home of practice [?]. But if you really understand what does it mean by those explanation of *okesa* and of zazen practice, you will find out, "Oh, that is not two different thing. It is just one practice. It is not different in its spirit."

Right now, I don't have enough time to explain the sūtra we recited right now. But for an instance, here it says, "The miraculous or supernatural power of *okesa* is beyond our understanding."⁴ And it will lead our practice to go [?]. And it will enrich our practice. The word "supernatural" or "beyond our

² The great mythical bird who feeds upon dragons; one of the eight guardians of Buddhism (along with *devas*, dragons, *et al.*).

³ Eshun Yoshida-rōshi: Teacher of *okesa* sewing in the lineage of Eko Hashimoto-rōshi.

⁴ Attributed to Shākyamuni Buddha by Dōgen-zenji in *Shōbōgenzō* "Kesa-kudoku."

understanding," you know, it is nothing but another explanation of our zazen practice. We always say, "Just practice zazen. Just practice zazen." Why we say so is even though you think about it, you know, your thinking mind will not reach the real virtue of our practice because it is beyond our understanding.

We practice zazen, you know. By practice, only by practice you will understand what it is. And you will find out the real meaning of your everyday life: eating, sleeping, working, you know—whatever you do, because [if] your conduct, your intention [attention?] is based upon our true practice it makes sense. If we lose the foundation of real practice, our life does not mean anything even though you live more than one hundred years. It does not mean anything.

Today, at last, I could receive the proper—right *okesa*, properly made. I don't think—I don't think it is too late for me to receive this *okesa*. I don't think so. I'm still think I am very lucky to receive it, you know. You may think "He is—you know, "We thought he is a great Zen master, but he just received *okesa* today." [Laughs.] You may think you—you are fooled by me. But, you know, my spirit is always aiming at one thing—one truth, which can be true with everyone: layman and priest, Japanese and American, and Indian people and European nation. We are in just one truth. That is why I always say it is not so easy thing to achieve Buddha's way. It cannot be so easy as long as our cultural background is different, as long as our way of life is different, our language is different, it cannot be so easy.

But there is something which all of us aim at. The *okesa* is the symbol of that oneness—the expression of this, you know, one goal, one spirit. Maybe even though I receive *okesa* right now, even though I shave my head long, long time ago, I must shave my head again and again. Even though I received ordination long, long time ago, but still it is necessary to receive *okesa*. Many and many a times [1 word unclear: "really"?] this kind of sincere practice, as long as you are—you do not lose the sincerity or way-seeking mind for the ultimate goal of human being, then every time you do something, that practice will enrich your experience of dharma and strength—make your spirit stronger and stronger. And you will be really a good example of bodhisattva.

No one can be too late to receive proper *okesa*. No one can be too late to be ordained as a Buddhist. Here I mean—Buddhist—I said "Buddhist," but I don't mean any special, you know, religious group. Only when you neglect—only when you lose the spirit to attain the oneness of all being, including all monks, all animate and inanimate being.

You say "this religion or that religion," "layman or priest." Actually, all of us should be eventually priests—all of us, without any exception. All of us should be priest. But until we have—we can accept priesthood from the bottom of the heart—bottom of your heart, you will be laymen. As Dōgen-zenji said, right now we are teacher and disciple. But all of us are actually friend—friends of Buddhist.

Those who received *okesa* already, you should appreciate what does it mean—the meaning of receiving it. And those who haven't, you know, respect *okesa*. And you should know someday you will receive *okesa*. And those who joined this family by chance, also should know—or may know some day what we are doing here. Some day.

So if you practice our way, this kind of spirit, you know, whatever you do, it makes sense. When you lose this spirit, you will be lost. Even though you wear *okesa*, you will be lost. So, you know, to respect the truth is a very important thing. You shouldn't—you shouldn't say "this or that" because everything has some meaning as they are.

I am so happy to have Yoshida-rōshi here in Zen Center to introduce the real practice for us. I met Yoshida-rōshi's teacher and master [Eko] Hashimoto-rōshi⁵ at Eihei-ji only once. But I heard of his sincere practice for long, long time. And he is no more. So Yoshida-rōshi is as a successor of Hashimoto-rōshi, striving for the study of *okesa* and continue Hashimoto-rōshi's spirit. I don't know how to express my gratitude for her and for her teacher Hashimoto-rōshi. Hashimoto-rōshi was a good friend of my teacher Kishizawa [Ian]-rōshi and also my master [Gyokujun So-on Suzuki] who helped Kishizawa-rōshi.⁶

In Japan, you say Buddhism is almost died. But I don't think so. When, you know, something looks like dying, true spirit will arise. That is always true with something which is [1 word unclear]. If it is died—if it is dying, I think "let it die." If it is not true, it will die. So, you know, Buddha take care of something which is dying. If something is true, it will arise again. And true teacher will appear in some way. It is not number of people, but the quality of our practice. I think something will happen to America, where there is so many sincere student.

Thank you very much.

Thank you very much for [several words not clear: probably addressing Yoshida-rōshi, possibly in Japanese].

Source: Original tape SR-71-06-06. Translation of Japanese terms and research assistance by Shōhaku Okumura-sensei. Transcribed verbatim by Bill Redican (10/22/01).

⁵ Eko Hashimoto-rōshi: 1890–1965.

⁶ Kishizawa Ian-rōshi: 1865–1955.