

Mike Rollin

RECEIVING THE PRECEPT ROBE

If a dragon obtains a small piece of the robe it can be cured of febrile diseases. If an ox touches the robe with one of its horns, its past wrongdoings disappear.

Dogen, *The Power of the Robe*

I put on the robe because I'm scared to death I'll wander through the world
and not live in my whole life.

I put on the robe – the buddha dharma sangha skin is night blue cotton-poly blend
made to last a little while longer.

I put on the robe because after the precept ceremony my aunt dreamt of the sister-in-law
she doesn't get along with and felt a chance to get closer.

I put on the robe because "why is already extra."

I put on the robe waking up crying in the morning
sick of being alone in this bed.

I put on the robe, wonder, do I look like a buddhist? a buddha? a robe-wearer?

I put on the robe because sewing it I remembered dad at the kitchen table
making models of crowns and fillings under the lamp pulled down from the ceiling. He
wore holey white t-shirts, worked late into the night. His patients remembered
his gentle hands and how he always made them laugh.

I put on the robe because of my great beneficent teachers: Thich Nhat Hahn, who taught me
how to sit and breathe like a cloud and heavy machinery, Shogaku Shunryu daiosoho, who
took the honey off the breakfast table, "You think you can make everything taste just how
you want it," and my mother, who said, "Wake up, you can sleep when you're dead."

I put on the robe because ice melting off the farmers' market roof backlit by afternoon
sun is the most beautiful thing after seven days of retreat inside my crunchy thoughts.

I put on the robe because during jury duty for gang war shooting I watched the witness lie
openly on the stand and say, "I don't give a fuck if my boyfriend gets shot"
and "I don't give a fuck if he dies." At that moment I didn't either,
not sure now.

I put on the robe taking refuge in buddha eight stitches per inch.
The Sharpe #9 needle gives my heart/hand a place to be.

I put on the robe because I finally talked with my brother about christianity and buddhism.
He's uneasy about buddhism, I'm tired of christianity. Maybe we can "support each other,"
at least we had something to talk about.

I put on the robe because I forget simple human kindness.

I put on the robe because I wanted to hide my crooked stitches and curved seams,

now they're really starting to grow on me.

I put on the robe to say yes, not do feasibility studies.

I put on the robe because Grandma Edith reached for my hand in the back seat of our car on the way to church. Moody adolescent, sometimes I held her hand, sometimes I didn't.

I put on the robe of my dharma name "Mysterious Name," given by Dosho with family, friends, and excellent community present, a slow rainy Saturday, fall equinox, the hidden sun holding an arced balance of night and day.

I put on the robe writing these words. Gold leaves rattle in the streets, Tomahawk missiles batter Afghanistan, this bright and frightening day, October 7, 2001.