

Why wear clothes?

The naked truth that frees

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Why do monks and nuns wear robes, besides hiding their nakedness? Why hide their nakedness, in the first place? Perhaps, the reason is that our body can be more powerful than our mind, or rather overpower our heart, which then exposes us to others. I think the real reason we all hide our nakedness is because we probably look alike when naked. We are all vulnerable.

Naked, we stand alike. Neither good nor bad; neither rich nor poor; neither high nor low; neither holy nor profane. Maybe, in our nakedness, some of us look better, others undesirable. There lies the rub. We are unable to even handle our own nakedness. So we hide it under clothes.

Our clothes do not define us

Our clothes do not define us; they only define our image. This is the mask we wear to stay safe in the world; to exploit it, and, above all, to control others by pretending that we are better, stronger, wealthier, holier than others. But we are all naked underneath, all the same.

The clothes we wear empower us. Imagine if some clothes-eating cloud suddenly overwhelmed us and all those God-using men lost their womanly clothes, and those Great Vehicle priests are caught naked in their swimming pools or in bed. Surely our lotus palms will wilt into lifeless reeds in the light of the bright sun.

Pockets of the pious

Oh, yes, we need pockets to carry cash and gadgets, and the religious get a lot of that. Modern banking methods make it easier for the cloth (as we call the uniformed empowered religious) with cards, platinum and gold, especially. The religious uniforms also hide the cards we have, so that the pious poor will give us what little they can afford out of boundless faith and joyful eyes.

For this reason, the Buddha instructs his renunciants to wear rag-robes without pockets. The early robes were design-free, not bespoke. Yet they fit each saint like a second skin for the blessing of those who see them. The rag-robes do not define these early saints. They shine in their robes. Yet, they came from pieces of rags that were discarded and rejected by others, gathered from the dust-heap.

Renouncing clothes

For those who walk with faith on the path of the saints, these rag-robes remind them of renunciation. They live to let go of every truth they learn, for a greater, more liberating truth, until they are freed of all views. This is the final layer of cloth that burdens them with

a body. They are no more slaves of their senses, but masters of the mind, healers of the heart.

This is the Buddha's teaching of renunciation embedded in every piece of clothing we wear. We soil the clothes we wear; this is the bad karma we accumulate. We wash, dry and arrange our clothes: this is our life of moral virtue, which comforts us and others with modesty.

Clothes free

These clothes do not project an image but show our true goodness. They are like the wings of a free bird that flies in the open sky. These clothes free us from the body, open our mind and brightens our heart. Let those who have eyes see, those who have ears hear, those with a mind understand, those with a heart awaken to true reality and nirvana.

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[an occasional re-look at the Buddha's Example and Teachings]

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