



Preparing for a Loved One's Death

SHINGON BUDDHIST TRADITIONS IN HAWAII



Breathing in and out gives birth to
our life.

We leave this world of earth and
water as if to have a rest.

Perfect kings, aristocrats, and
ministers

Prosper in spring, fall in autumn, and
pass on like a stream.

Meditate deeply to know the very
bottom of the mind.

Where the Great Mirrorlike Wisdom
of Mahavairocana shines infinite
virtue all around.

— Kobo Daishi (Kukai)

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Introduction

Planning for a loved one's death may be sudden or years in the making. But it is hardly ever easy.

As a caregiver, you spend your time making sure your loved one is safe and comfortable. Alongside the health care team, you may have social workers, lawyers, financial advisors, and even neighbors pitching in.

Spiritual life is in the private realm for many seniors. Clergy, though, can be an important part of your loved one's care team.

Religious traditions in Hawai'i reflect the rich and diverse cultures of our families. Buddhism in Hawai'i has also evolved, and our services are inclusive of other beliefs so that we can respect traditions together.

In our temples, we have ministered to many believers who found great comfort and strength in Buddhist teachings. We have also supported families who continued Buddhist rituals out of deep appreciation and respect for their ancestors.

As *sansei*, *yonsei*, and further generations take on the role of caregivers for our parents and grandparents, we wanted to share more – in English – about the end-of-life Shingon Buddhist traditions in Hawai'i.

We know that modern life is busy, and families have different traditions and practices. To help you plan for your loved one, we have included a *gorinto* or five-level stupa next to sections that have a particular spiritual significance.

Finally, we want to thank you for supporting your loved one and for taking the time to learn more about these rituals that bring them peace.

Koboji Shingon Mission

Preparing for your role

When a loved one is dying, they are taking on the work of physically and spiritually preparing for the next world. As a caregiver or family member, you also have two important roles:

1. To support the person you love and
2. to take good care of yourself.

Every family is unique. Sometimes there is more time to prepare than others. During this time, you may be able to gather your loved one's wishes or more information that will be useful later in the process.

Please remember to take care of yourself during this time. Social workers, therapists, and clergy of your faith traditions may be helpful in processing your individual experience. Some hospices have support groups for others going through the death of a loved one.

When death is near

One of the hardest decisions to make is when to say goodbye. Your loved one's care team may know when death is near, but sometimes passing is more sudden.

Let family members and close friends know as soon as it's obvious that death is near. Being together allows family members to support one another.

Your loved one's room should be clean, comfortable, and safe so that their journey is quiet and peaceful. Constantly assure them that you're there.

Sometimes, a loved one waits for the family to leave the room, as if they were unable to let go while loved ones were there.

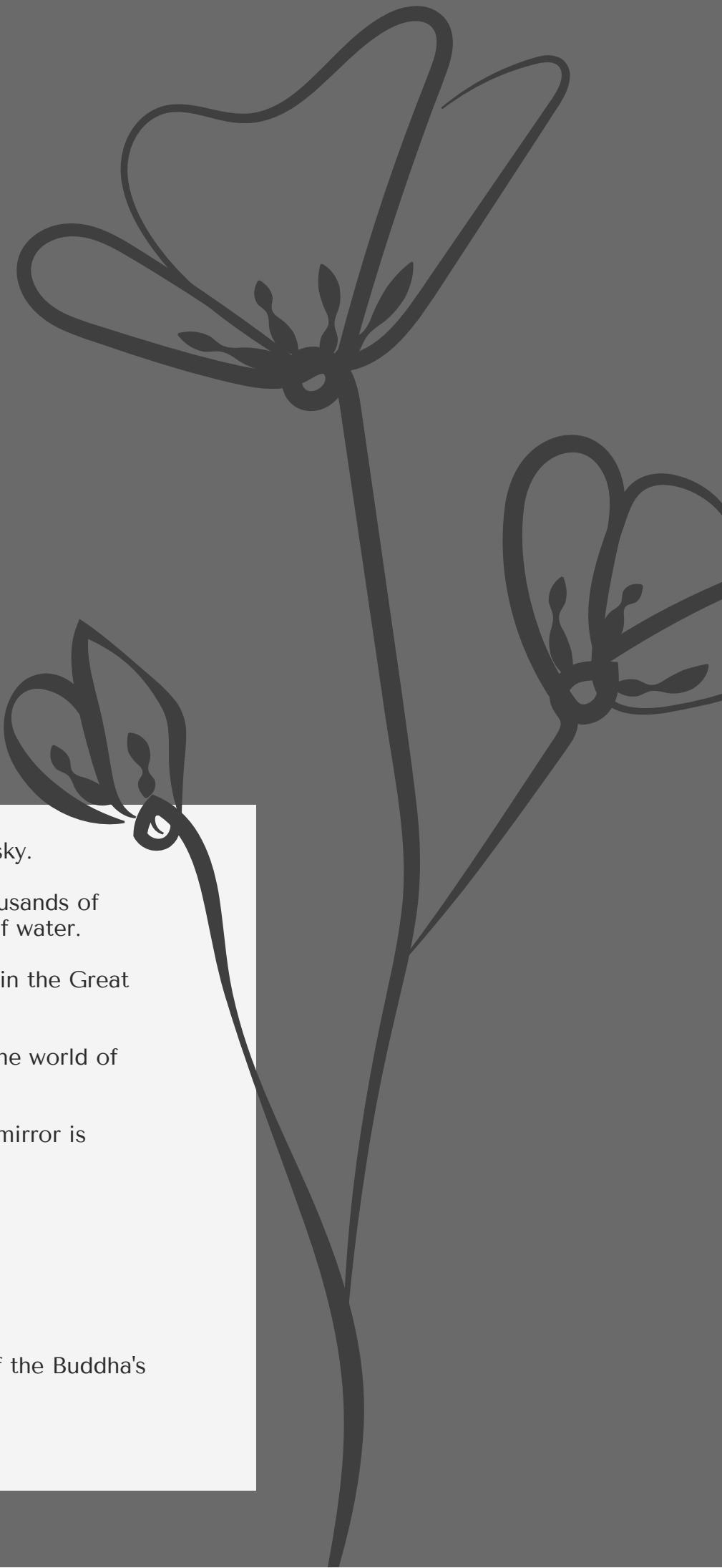
MAKURAGYO BEDSIDE SERVICE

A *makuragyo* is a bedside service sometimes referred to as last rites. The Buddhist priest will perform a service and symbolically provide your loved one with their last food and drink in this world so that they will be ready to move on to the next.

In Hawaii, it has become traditional to hold this service before your loved one's passing. This becomes an opportunity for family and friends to pray for a safe and comfortable transition to the next world.

The rhythmic chanting of sutras and mantras can be soothing to loved ones accustomed to Buddhist services. The prayers also allow for an opportunity to focus your thoughts and energies for your loved one's peaceful transition.

If a *makuragyo* cannot be performed, a pre-cremation service is sometime scheduled.



A full moon hangs in the sky.

Moonlight reflects on thousands of
rivers and on all the jars of water.

The Buddha-mind is calm in the Great
Void.

It dwells in all people in the world of
illusion.

A water moon in a round mirror is
deceptive.

So is the self we put on.

With the heart of Fudo

I would preach to people:

Please wear the clothes of the Buddha's
great compassion.

— Kobo Daishi (Kukai)

When a death is reported

When your loved one passes, we believe that their spirit remains in this world for 49 days. They are not ready to leave us, and they want to make sure that we are okay. After death, the immediate family should continue to make sure that your loved one's spirit is comfortable and safe by preparing a home altar that is used until the funeral.

PREPARING A HOME ALTAR

Place a white tablecloth on a flat surface. Display a photo of only your loved one in the center of the table. A candle should be placed to the right of the photo. An LED or non-flame light would also do. The candlelight allows your loved one to find their way to their loved ones.

Offerings of incense, water, flowers, food, and rice should be made if allowed in your home. In Hawaii, a fresh lei can be used in lieu of flowers.

Rice should be placed in a *chawan* (rice bowl) with a single chopstick inserted into the center of the cooked rice. Be sure to change the rice at least every 3-4 days until the funeral.



INFORMING THE TEMPLE

Please inform the temple when death occurs in the first 48 hours so that short prayers may be said. If you have not already shared information about your loved one with the temple, please be prepared to answer a few questions. Common questions can be found on page 15.

REQUESTING A *KAIMYO* NAME

After death, families request a *kaimyo* or posthumous name for their loved one. This name will be bestowed by a Buddhist priest and written on a special wooden tablet called an *ihai*.

The *kaimyo* name is unique to the individual and is made according to the personality and life of the deceased. A *kaimyo* is the new name that your loved one will be known by in the Buddha's world. If you request a *kaimyo*, it will be announced by the priest at your loved one's funeral.

Cremation

Cremation is the tradition in many East Asian cultures. To this day, families may be present at the time of cremation in Asia.

In Hawaii, due to different regulations and traditions, cremations are usually the exclusive purview of mortuaries.

Nevertheless, there are still cremation rituals that are observed in the islands.

PRECREMATION INFORMATION

Families sometimes request a precremation service be performed if a *makuragyo* service was not done earlier. Because this often incurs an additional cost from the mortuary, this service is often deferred.

The mortuary will work with you to make arrangements for your loved one's cremation.

CREMATION CONSIDERATIONS

The following items should be provided to the mortuary for the cremation. In many ways it is similar to planning for a trip.

- Clothes. Whatever your loved one enjoyed wearing, such as a uniform or sportswear. Include a complete set: shirt, pants, underwear, shoes, socks, slippers.
- Eyeglasses, dentures, caps or hat.
- Money. Put one of each 1 cent, 5 cents, 10 cents, and a dollar bill into a resealable storage bag.
- Omamori or Ojuzu. Include an amulet or prayer beads used by the deceased.
- Letters or drawing to the deceased.

Do not include photos or drawings of the living. Do not include jewelry.

TOMOBIKI DATES

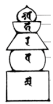
The traditional Japanese calendar had a six-day week that was inherited from China and India. The days of the week were based on external energies that could not be exactly discerned.

Tomobiki means to bring misfortune to a friend. ("Tomo" means "friend" and "Biki" means "to kidnap.") Funerals should not be held on *Tomobiki* days so that misfortune does not travel between this world and the next.

If a cremation is to be held on a *Tomobiki* date, a new doll or stuffed animal should be included with the body. The doll or stuffed animal must not be touched or used by anyone else.

Most mortuaries in Hawaii know of *Tomobiki* dates. Encourage your funeral director to contact a temple if they have any questions.

Preparing for the funeral



FUNERALS

During the Buddhist funeral service, the priest performs chanting and rituals that place your loved one's spirit on the path to the Buddha's world. Along with the 49th day memorial service, a Buddhist funeral is one of the most important end-of-life rituals held.

The sutras that are chanted during funerals can only be recited by priests who can ritually place a spirit onto the Buddha's path. Without the rituals, your loved one may not be able to completely ascend to the next world.

CELEBRATIONS OF LIFE

Families may choose to hold a celebration-of-life or shortened funeral service for family and friends to attend. In these more informal services, a minister may be included to offer a short prayer or meditation.

If sutras and rituals are not performed at the public service, a funeral should still be held to ensure your loved one's spirit is ready to enter the Buddha's world. This can be held at the temple with family or with the minister alone. Koboji Shingon Mission regularly holds these intimate services.

INURNMENT & COMMITTAL SERVICES

East Asian burial traditions are more elaborate than allowed here. As a result, in Hawaii, graveside services are usually short ceremonies with only immediate family members.

Since some family members may have difficulty walking in cemetery areas, it can usually be held in a committal area near the plot.

Please note that some veteran's cemeteries have very strict limits on committal services. Please contact the cemetery for more information.

RECEIVING THE KAIMYO AND IHAI

When a Buddhist priest bestows a *kaimyo* name on your loved one, it will be written on a wooden tablet called an *ihai*.

During the funeral, your loved one's Buddhist name will be announced and explained. It is usually a meaningful experience for the family.

The wooden *ihai* will be given to your family to bring home following the service. It represents the physical home of the spirit in this world. Families will often place offerings of flowers and food in front of the *ihai* throughout the year.

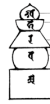
Please keep your loved one's *ihai* in a place of honor, such as a Buddhist altar in your home.

Memorial services (Hoji)

In the Shingon Buddhist belief, there are different deities who come to greet and assist your loved one on their journey to the Buddha's world. Like a patron saint or guide, these deities help your loved one transition to their place in the next world.

In the memorial services called *Hoji*, the priest will invoke the spirit of the deceased to join with the Buddhas in the temple. Through virtuous deeds, such as the offering of food, the chanting of sutras, and mantras of the patron deities, family and friends will gain and transfer merit to the deceased.

Since ancient times, memorial services were held every seven days after a person's death for seven weeks. These services at the temple or at your home are thought of as helping your loved one prepare to cross over to the Buddha's world.



49th DAY MEMORIAL SERVICE

By the 49th day after death, your loved one will be ready to move onto the Buddha's world with the help of the family and patron deities. At the 49th day memorial service, the family gathers to send off the spirit of their departed loved one.

Every effort should be made to hold a 49th day memorial service.

100th DAY MEMORIAL SERVICE

By the 100th day, your loved one will have fully transitioned to the Buddha's world accompanied by Kannon Bosatsu. Also known as Guanyin or Kwan Yin, Kannon Bosatsu is the keeper of peace. During this *hoji*, the priest and family prays that the soul of the departed is enjoying peace in the Buddha's world.

WHAT TO BRING TO A HOJI

During hoji services, families are asked to bring a picture of their loved one and osonae (offerings).

Osonae are flowers and food for to be placed on the altar. Please bring flowers and vegetarian food that your loved one enjoyed. Food should not include meat.

Traditionally this was mochi, manju, or fruit. If possible, do not bring flowers with thorns. During the service, the priest will dedicate the offering to your loved one.

Most hoji last less than an hour depending on the amount of people who attend. Some temples now offer service booklets in English so that attendees can understand the prayers being said for their loved ones.



夜走らす舟や

Just as ships that run in the night

子ぬ方星見当てい

Are guided to safety by the North Star

我ん生ちえる親や

I am guided by my parents

我んどう見当てい

Who gave birth to me and watch over me

天咲ぬ花

TINSAGU NU HANA
OKINAWAN FOLK SONG

Prayers & Support

At Koboji, we offer three *senko* stick incense every time we pray. The first is for the Buddhas who watch over our ancestors in the next world. The second is for our ancestors who guide and protect us in this world. The third is for our families who help us live well here.

Our departed loved ones are still supporting us even after we send them to the Buddha's world. They are never too distant from us, but there are certain times of the year when they are especially close.

OBON

During the season of *Obon*, the spirits of our departed loved ones return to this world guided by the light of paper lanterns in our temples and homes. To welcome them, offerings of food and flowers are made at altars and temples.

During *Obon* season, families request that their loved ones' names are written on thin wooden tablets called *toba*. During the *Obon* service, the minister will recite sutras and call the names written on the *toba* to invite those spirits to return to this world.

When we say prayers and make offerings during *Obon*, we can help ensure that our loved ones are comfortable in the next world.

Private and group *Obon* services are held at temples, usually in the seventh month of the lunar or solar calendar.



HATSUBON

The first *Obon* following your loved one's passing is their *hatsubon* or first *obon*. Prayers are made at the temple and family members offer special food and water.

Hatsubon is a significant service because it marks the first occasion when your loved one joins the chorus of ancestors back in this world.

Hatsubon families have a special role in *Obon* services and are recognized for their filial support of their departed loved one.

HIGAN

During the spring and fall equinox, when day and night are equal, it is said that we are closest to the other shore of the Buddha's world. It is a time when our ancestors are once again close to us.

Before the equinox, families will request that *toba* be created with their loved one's names. At *higan* service, the *toba* names will be read to call departed spirits to this world. Those in attendance at the service will be able to offer powered incense called *shoko* to their ancestors. The smell of the incense is said to be pleasing to the spirits, and it is our opportunity to check-in on our loved ones.

Toba can be requested by calling the temple office. Each name will be written for a nominal donation.

NOKOTSUDO

While it is traditional to leave your loved ones' *ihai* on your family altar, some families choose to leave their loved one's *ihai* in the care of a temple. In the *nokotsudo* columbarium, Buddhist priests will make daily offerings and prayers to the spirits of all those housed there.

Shingon Buddhist priests will offer "secret" prayers, such as *darani*, that are only taught to qualified individuals after ascetic training. These daily prayers allow your loved ones to enjoy a peaceful existence in the Buddha's world.

It is customary to offer the temple an annual donation in appreciation for their care of your loved one's *ihais*. Some temples publish a schedule of fees while others merely appreciate a donation.

Sample Questions

The following list of questions may be requested by the mortuary, temple, and other parties after your loved one passes.

Sharing this information with the temple will allow for prayers to be said and for a *kaimyo* name to be created.

Understanding what information is required can help you to plan what documents will need to be prepared.

- Full name of the deceased.
- Date of birth.
- Date of death.
- Cause of death.
- Occupation. Retired?
- Spouse's name. Predeceased?
- Children. List names from oldest to youngest.
- Number of grandchildren and great grandchildren.
- Short description of the deceased.
- Any funeral plans? Mortuary?

Please be sure to share your point of contact's information with the temple and mortuary.

IN CLOSING

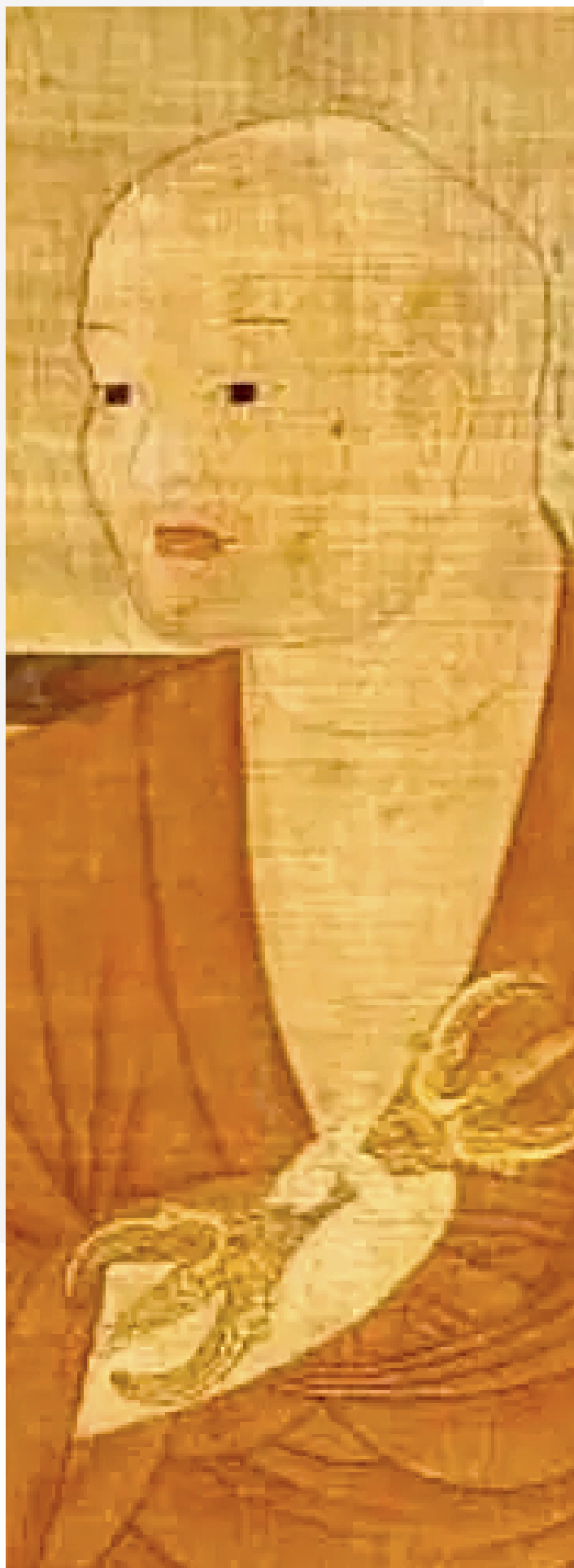
Thank you again for supporting your loved one and for taking the time to read more about their beliefs and traditions.

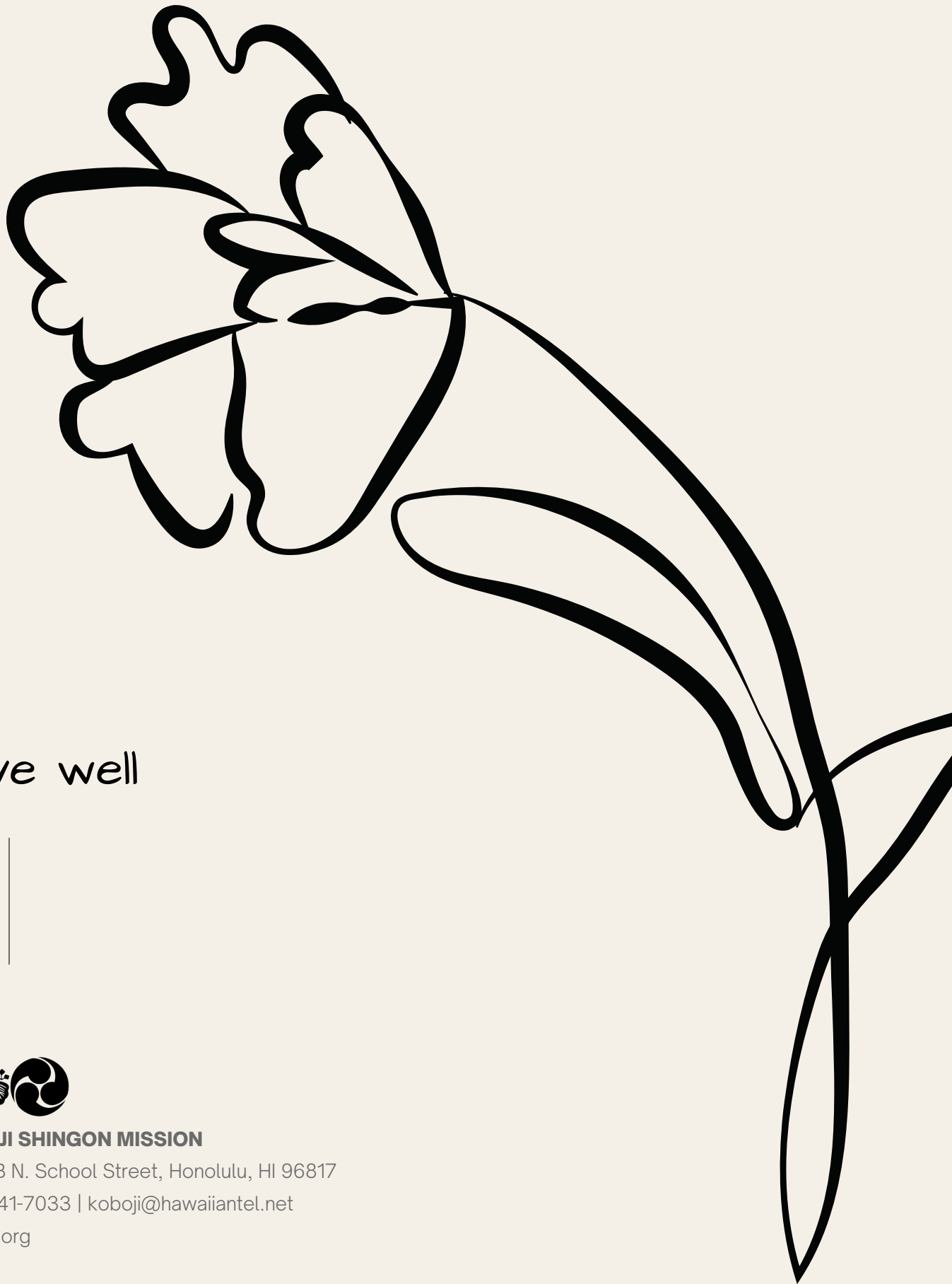
This booklet is based on our experiences and how we were taught in our spiritual lineage. It's not meant to be comprehensive or definitive, but a starting point to demystify many of the traditions around death. Buddhism has many streams and traditions, and your experience may be different than ours. We hope that this booklet has helped explain some of the rituals and traditions that you may have seen.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the authors at Koboji Shingon Mission or your family temple.

In closing, we leave you with the holy name of the patriarch of Shingon Esoteric Buddhism, Kobo Daishi (Kukai). May the noble beings of the Buddha's world bring you peace and strength.

NAMU DAISHI HENJO KONGO
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Live well



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