



GASSHO

March
2013

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"Hands together in reverence & gratitude"



EIGHTFOLD PATH AND FIVE PRECEPTS

by rev. roland k. tatsuguchi

You are not merely a body covered by a bag of skin. You also are not just what your eyes are seeing, ears are hearing, nostrils are smelling, taste buds are tasting or what your fingers are touching and manipulating. Most significantly, you are a complete person blessed with a "steady pulsating heart" connected to two lungs constantly inhaling and exhaling the vital breath of life. And, even more importantly, you are a human being with a conscience constantly trying to make sense out of your brief conscious moments of life on this earth which is like a "burning house." Therefore, you need to awaken your "conscience" and begin to seek out a life that is true, real, genuine and sincere.

Because our eyeballs are incapable of seeing what is beyond the visible blue skies above, we need to "trust" and take refuge in an unseen source of Selfless Wisdom by "taking refuge" in its All-embracing Compassion that "enables" us to have faith in the Great Beyond that awaits us all beyond the visible golden radiant sunset. For the "setting sun" disappearing over the western horizon, in reality, is not being obliterated by the oncoming night's darkness. For the "setting sun" once again will reappear as the next morning's "dawning sun" that lights up as it disperses the former night's darkness to transform it into the very light of day without incinerating it.

As the sun keeps appearing, disappearing and reappearing again and again, we earthlings over the passing generations living on this constantly revolving earth become even more keenly aware of the fact that "all things are constantly changing and can never remain the same" (*sarva dhamma annica*). And as the seconds keep "ticking" by, we earthlings begin wondering why we keep "talking" about the things we should not be talking about, and mindlessly keep doing the things we should

MONTH'S THOUGHT



The compassion of Amida expresses itself in many unseen and hidden ways as the world itself, and to be an active part of that compassion in a spontaneous, non-ego-centered way is the ultimate end of faith in Shin Buddhism.

Transcendent does not mean "escape from." It means "more than" and is the something more which provides the person with a true sense of meaning and value, which places into question every lesser loyalty, value, and obligation. Taken from Kenmyo Taira Sato's *Daisetzu T. Suzuki and Saichi Asahara, a Shin Buddhist Poet*.



not be doing. This is why we human beings like drug addicts keep repeating the same old addictions day after day after day. This is exactly how we human beings keep repeating "ceaseless births and deaths," because of the black boar (greed), the venomous asp (hatred), and the prancing rooster (vanity) active in the very center of our beings constantly assailing us with blind passions and burning cravings.

In other words, human beings act, react and respond to the demands of their ego, egoism and egoity that are constantly being driven by the most subtle of unseen forces within their subconscious and unconscious selves. They are constantly drawn to things that are pleasurable and rewarding as they, all the while, try to sidestep and avoid things that are painful and troublesome, especially the naked truth about our shameful transgressions and desecrations. Because of causation, they keep suffering the karmic consequences of their thoughts, words and actions.

REMINDERS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

SERVICES FOR MARCH 2013

1st SUN Mar 3rd:

9 A.M. English Service
Dharma Talk
For Children & Adults
Rev. Tatsuguchi

2nd SUN Mar 10th:

9 A.M. Eng. Service
Dharma Talk
For Children & Adults
Rev. Tatsuguchi

3rd SUN Mar 17th:

Spring O'Higan Service

9 A.M. Eng. Service
Guest Speaker
Rev. Alan Urasaki

4th SUN Mar 24th:

9 A.M. Eng. Service
Dharma Talk
For Children & Adults
Rev. Tatsuguchi

5th SUN Mar 31st:

MONTHLY FAMILY WORSHIP
9 A.M. Eng Service
Dharma Talk for Children & Adults
Rev. Tatsuguchi

WEEKLY ACTIVITIES

KARAOKE SINGERS CLUB Mon 7 - 9 p.m.
Mr. Nelson Yoshioka

KARATE CLASSES Tues & Fri 6 - 8 p.m.
Shihan - Walter Nishioka

FUJINKAI LADIES' FELLOWSHIP GROUP
Wed 9 a.m. - noon

Fujinkai Luncheon

11 a.m. Sunday, March 10
at Tokoname Sushi, Manoa Marketplace
(where Hanaki Restaurant was)

\$ 7 Fujinkai members
\$ 14 First guest
\$ 21 Other guests

Call the office at 973-0150

Please RSVP by March 3

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2013 Memorial Service Schedule

2012	1 Year	2011	3 Year	2007	7 Year
2001	13 Year	1997	17 Year	1989	25 Year
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Fortunately, however, there is a Buddha who resides in the very center of our personhood. This Buddha is not affected by the troublesome antics of the boar, asp and rooster constantly trying to be the very one on the very top of the others. This Buddha stands for the Buddha's Mind of Wisdom, Heart of Compassion, and her Nature of Non-violence. This Buddha in our centermost being is constantly telling us to trust in the Timeless Dharma's Truth of Selflessness. With a "voiceless voice" she is also telling us to take refuge in the Dharma's Reality of Togetherness that embraces all beings without any rejections.

To trust in Amida is to take refuge in the virtues of her Sacred Name that is manifesting the Dharma's All-inclusive Togetherness that "transforms" the utter darkness within ourselves into the very brilliance of light, which is like when you switch on the lights in a dark room. A life so illumined begins radiating with generosity and kindness for it has been transformed by the Light that is the Truth of Selflessness. As of consequence, such a person illuminated by Amida's Wisdom Light experiences gratitude, humility, and especially a heartfelt penitence that is sheer joy and pure happiness. This is because such a person has been embraced "just as she or he is" within a Togetherness never ever to be abandoned because it is a Compassion without favoritisms or exclusions.

D. T. Suzuki in his *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist* refers to the crucifixion of Jesus and the final moments of the dying Buddha (p. 134). According to the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus was born of a virgin by immaculate conception as the Only Begotten Son of God destined to be crucified as the Lamb of God to pay for the sins of all mankind. He was nailed to hang vertically on a cross to suffer a slow, torturous death as he finally bled to death. Whereas, Sakyamuni Buddha was born of earthly royal parents to pass away serenely as he lay on his right side under the shade of two Sala trees on the horizontal as he calmly gazed in the westerly direction, perhaps gazing at the setting sun as it was disappearing over the western horizon. He was surrounded by all of creation, cosmic, celestial and terrestrial.

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WORDS OF SHINRAN

People who look down on teachers and who speak ill of the masters commit slander of the dharma. Those who speak ill of their parents are guilty of the five grave offenses. We should keep our distance from them.... There is such sorrow in being drunk on the wine of ignorance, yet they partake with pleasure of the three poisons* and the poisons have not yet abated. They have not yet awakened from the drunkenness of ignorance. ... SBT-Series. *Letters of Shinran*. No. 19. pp. 58, 59. * greed, hatreds, vanities.

These two images, one a pre-mature death at age thirty-three by cruelty and violence, the other a natural, serene passing after some eighty years of life, the last forty-five as an "enlightened teacher of all mankind." The two images are strikingly the very opposite of each other.

As of consequence, Suzuki wrote:

... there is no doubt that Buddhism is a religion of peace, serenity, equanimity, and equilibrium. It refuses to be combative and exclusive. On the contrary, it espouses broad-mindedness universal tolerance, and aloofness from discriminations. *Loc. cit.*, p. 138.

In Suzuki's eyes, the stages of birth, growth, decay and death" are seamless processes in which "all the things of earth go through renovation and a refreshing transformation. A new sun rises above the horizon and the whole of universe is revealed" (pp. 132, 133). In other words, one's life is part and parcel of a series of lives that is continuously an upward spiritual journey until one's Buddhahood is finally attained!

Therefore, wrote Suzuki, "Buddhism is really a religion of strenuousness and infinite patience" (*loc. cit.*, p. 138). The reason is because Buddhism involves a process of "transforming" the darkness of ignorance within one's self into the very brilliance of enlightenment (*ten' mei kai' go*). It is not a process of obliterating and exterminating darkness by labeling or profiling an evil that is an abomination to God.

This transformation process in Buddhism, therefore, was mythically depicted by the first six steps and the seventh step that the "just born" Infant Buddha took as soon as he was born out of

the right side of his mother at the level of her heart. The seventh step that Infant Buddha took into the Great Unknown Beyond and his "stepping right back into" into this world was to indicate that the very World of Dharma from whence he originally came, is inseparable from this world of ours. This seventh step, therefore, also stands for one's "leap of faith" into the waiting arms of Amida Buddha to be taken to the Pure Land which is the Dharma World that paradoxically permeates and pervades in all things and sentient beings here, there and everywhere on this very earth of ours as well as throughout the entire universe.

All the while as Infant Buddha's mother was giving birth, she was standing upright as she was supported by a branch of a Bodhi-tree! Infant Buddha depicted as being born out of the right side of the mother was to indicate that matters of sacred and spiritual significance are experienced in one's innermost heart of hearts where Amida's "voiceless voice" is constantly calling out to all of us to trust in the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness by taking refuge in its Reality of All-embracing Togetherness. The branch of the Bodhi-tree that lowered itself to support the mother was to indicate that this world also is fully embraced and sustained through and by the Great Heart of Amida's Compassion. That is, this very earth of ours and the solar system as we know it is yet fully contained and sustained by the unfathomable cosmos whose bounds are unknown and unfathomable.

The seventh step ("leap of faith) of Infant Buddha, therefore, can also be likened to the polluted rivers that have flowed and disappeared into the boundless ocean that have instantly become its very waters of blue and emerald green. In doing so, the waters of a river have not been obliterated. The waters, instead, instantaneously have become the very unfathomable waters and free flowing currents of the greater boundless ocean. So, likewise, when sentient beings are "reborn" in the Pure Land, they join the community of Eternal Buddhas and instantly become the very equal of all the other Buddhas. This transformation also can be understood as raindrops falling into the ocean to become in that very instant the very waters of the ocean. The waters of the ocean keep reappearing as countless morning dewdrops that become raindrops raining on this earth to refresh and reburbish all flora and fauna.

Thus, the World of Dharma and the world of sentient beings are inseparable as are the waters of a river and the waters of a boundless ocean. So too are the waters in dewdrops and raindrops. This inseparability was indicated by the Infant Buddha when he "turned about" to re-enter the "six realms

of transmigration" to share the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness and its Reality of Togetherness in the form of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path to awaken and guide us all to the attainment of our Buddhahoods. This is why he was revered as the World's Most Honored and Enlightened One!

When Infant Buddha took that step right back into the world of sentient beings to return to the exact spot where he first landed on his two feet, he is said to have declared with a lion's roar that he would be the very one to lead all of mankind out of this world that is an "burning house" back into the Boundless Realms of True Light and Real Life.

Therefore, the first six steps stand for the arena of the six sense organs, the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, skin surfaces sensitive to touch, and finally, one's fabricating brain. The stepping out in the World of Dharma and the stepping back into this world of ceaseless births and deaths means that the Greater Unbounded Dimensions in which things are eternally sacred and timelessly spiritual fully contain and permeate this world of ours. The Noble Eightfold Path, therefore, is to be seen as a two-way street, a bridge connecting this world of samsara fully within and embraced by the world of Nirvana.

Now, a careful analysis of the Eightfold Noble Path reveals that one's body, mind, heart and spirit are also inseparable and interconnected. Therefore, to care for one's physical health and mental well being is to regard one's mind, heart, body and spirit and that of others to be of equal sacred and spiritual significance. Therefore, when seen from this perspective of the Dharma's Selflessness and Togetherness, the fifth precept then becomes even more about not ingesting harmful foods and drinks that affect one's spirituality as well as one's thoughts, emotions, words, actions.

Let us, therefore, consider the fact that we are alive because our lungs are steadily inhaling oxygenated air and exhaling carbon dioxide. This enables the blood in us to circulate throughout our body to keep each cell throughout our body alive and functional. We are alive because our heart keeps pulsating blood with oxygen and needed nutrients to replenish each cell to keep it alive. Most importantly, the vital functions of our brain are kept alive and intact by the steady flow of freshly oxygenated blood. When deprived of oxygenated blood for over five to six minutes, then our brain becomes permanently damaged, even brain dead.

Therefore, the pulsating heart connected to the brain is equally a vital organ. The heart also

keeps the five sense organs and their neural pathways alive through the spinal column connecting them to the brain. Blood is composed of red blood cells, white blood cells, platelets and plasma that flow through the blood vessels. Blood has several important functions throughout the body. Blood is pumped and refreshed through the heart because of the lungs inhaling oxygen and exhaling carbon dioxide. Oxygenated blood also carries important substances that help regulate and protect the body from infections.

Blood also collects waste materials (i.e., carbon dioxide, urea, lactic and uric acid and other toxins) that have diffused from cells into the blood to be carried away and be urinated or defecated. These urinating and defecatory functions are also vital processes.

Part of the body's self-repair mechanism (blood clotting after an open wound in order to stop bleeding — using "platelets") also produces antibodies that kill foreign bodies like bacteria and viruses that can harm and destroy a person like flesh-eating bacteria or Alzheimer's disease. Blood circulating throughout the body also controls body temperature. But the most crucial physiological function of the heart is to steadily transport oxygenated blood and crucial nutrients to each living cell throughout one's body, especially the cells of the heart and the brain.

Now, there are words beginning with the letter "f" that we need to be concerned about. They are "falsification," "frustration," "fear," "forgetfulness" and "foolishness" as spawned and fueled especially by the lies, deceptions and secret agendas of those in positions of power and control of our economic, political, military and especially our educational and religious institutions. We should be concerned about such "f" words because they not only factionalize but also subtly fabricate and formulate ideas and images to make people mindless and insensitive of each other so they can be set apart into fratricidal adversaries that can be easily exploited as laborers, consumers and cannon fodder. This is mainly accomplished through fiction, falsehoods and fabrications. Today, life has become not only full of mindless and insensitive people, but also full of "faceless corporations" that are downright "flabbergasting" because of their CEOs focused on making financial gains by avoiding losses at the expense of innocent people and vulnerable environments.

Upon careful analysis, you will see that to be walking the Eightfold Noble Path is also to be living the life of gratitude, reverence, humility, and a heartfelt penitence full of empathy, sympathy and

SHINRAN'S WASAN

While harboring doubts
about the Marvelous Vow,
The (re-) birth of those
reciting the (Sacred) Name,
Will be residing in the Palace*
for a period of 500 years,
Passing away those years vainly,
so said the Buddha.

Jodo Wasan No. 2

rkt trans. () mine.

*borderlands around
the Pure Land.

kindness, especially a life based on non-violence (*ahimsa*). To be truly alive is to be Rightly Contemplating Amida Buddha and the meanings of her Vows that have been crystalized into her Sacred Name full of Benevolence and Compassion. Right Thought is to be always thinking about Amida who never forsakes or abandons any sentient being, especially the karma riddled person. Right Speech is to be uttering Namoh-amida-butsu even "voicelessly" in the depths of one's heart in response to Amida's "voiceless voice" eternally calling and beckoning a person from deep within. Right action is to be bodily bowing and putting our hands together in *gassho*. Right Reflection is to know that Amida has grasped to embrace all sentient beings without discriminations or favoritisms to never forsake or abandon them. Right Contemplation is to acknowledge one's indebtedness by a life of gratitude and penitence.

Thus, the life of O-nembutsu constantly involves the "transformation" of one's mind, heart and spirit as one's whole being is "enabled" by power of Amida's Benevolence to refrain from harmful and hurtful ways and, instead, "empowered" to be generous, loving, kind and forgiving. To be so "transformed" is to have become a person helpful and healing without any secret agendas or hidden designs. Such a "transformation" cannot occur without first Rightly Contemplating Amida Buddha as being the very manifestation of the Dharma's Selflessness and Togetherness that has, is and yet continues to embrace sentient beings, not just only us human beings. In fact, this is what *nem-* (thinking of) and *butsu* (Buddha) is all about. Uttering O-nembutsu is to be imbued by the Truth of Selflessness and permeated by its Reality of Togetherness.

Shinran was "awakened" by the Dharma's very Light of Selflessness and its Life of Togetherness

that “enabled” him to realize that no matter whether a person be tall or short, male or female, wise or foolish, young or old, rich or poor, monk or householder, all beings have, are and yet continue to be grasped never to be abandoned or rejected by Amida. This is because she is without discriminations and favoritisms. By Rightly Contemplating Amida, Shinran became aware that he himself was a person riddled by implacable transgressions and desecrations who was, is and yet will be embraced by Amida. For she keeps equally and unconditionally embracing also the “good person” without playing favorites, such as accepting only saints while rejecting sinners. (See *Tannisho*. Ch. I & III.)

Let us then see what it is to be actually living the Eightfold path. First, one needs to maintain a clear mind and a sensitive heart that see into the actual causes and real reasons as to why one keeps repeating the same mistakes again and again. Second, one needs to stop being critical of the faults of others and how awful everything is. Even before one becomes suckered into negative thinking and feelings of anger and before emotionally reacting in rage, the first thing to do is to calm down and avoid speaking in ways that incite negative reactions because they in turn trigger responses of violence. Third, stop being overly critical of one’s failings and imperfections. Being overly critical means that one has become obsessed by a one-sided sense of what is “right” and what is “wrong” because of one’s spiritual ego, moral egoism and social egoity. For being obsessed means that one’s thoughts, words and actions have become radicalized by prejudices and biases that are one-sided.

As the Second Noble Truth indicates, it is necessary to pinpoint the actual “physical causes” as well as to ascertain the real “psychological reasons” as to why the same problem keeps cropping up again and again. Write these causes and reasons down so they cannot be forgotten or explained away by your clever excuses and evasive actions and reactions. Otherwise you will be unable to find the proper cure or a correct solution and course of action to resolve the difficulty you are experiencing. For wrong thinking, intention, language and reactions always bring their respective karmic consequences. Trying to solve a problem without properly analyzing the physical causes and not knowing the real reasons is like pouring the “water of life” into an upside down cup. Even more serious, it is like trying to calm a person’s blazing emotions, which is like pouring gasoline on a blazing fire.

So to be living the Eightfold Path, one needs to be “aware” of the fact that one’s self, in actuality,

is incapable of fulfilling perfectly the life of the Eightfold Path because of one’s inability to see things that are sacred and truths that are spiritual in our lives (See epilogue in *Tannisho*). This “realization,” paradoxically, then becomes the very key that enables one to make that “leap of faith” into the Great Unknown Beyond. It is the key that opens up the door to your heart so your whole being becomes illuminated by truths that are timelessly spiritual and become filled with things that are eternally sacred. This opening one’s heart is to be taken in by the Heart of Amida. This was symbolized by the outgoing steps and returning steps of the just-born Infant Buddha indicating that the Buddhas and sentient beings are inseparable and of the same essence (*butsu bon’ it’tai*) as are the waters in a dewdrop, raindrop, hailstone and the ocean itself.

However, warned Shinran Shonin, if a person keeps committing evils, he or she, in actuality, is keeping himself or herself from becoming a recipient and beneficiary of Amida’s Unconditional Compassion trying to grasp to embrace them so she can lead them all to their final Buddhahood. Such a person is much like the person in the parable of the “poisoned arrow” refusing to have the arrow extracted and the proper antidote applied. It is also more like a person who has taken the antidote for a poison, who then keeps ingesting the poison.

What Shinran himself became sorely aware of was that because he himself was such a person hopelessly riddled by irreversible karmic evils, he came to realize that this was exactly why he had been unconditionally embraced by Amida, never ever to be abandoned, condemned, or cast out. Shinran realized that what “... ultimately frees us is not our own ethical good but rather, the Inconceivable Wonder of the Original Vow” (R. Fujimoto. *loc. cit.*, p. 31). In other words, our efforts to do good, upon deep reflection, are constantly tainted by our pretentious spiritual egoism, regardless of whether we be monks or ordinary householders. This realization then is the crucial difference between an “evil person” who has been made fully aware that his “good works” are tainted, in comparison to a “good person” who is obsessed by doing the “right thing” because of his one-sided conviction that only “good persons” get to go to a “heaven” while “evil persons” are to be cast into a “hell!”

This is exactly why Shinran Shonin said:

... you should not be anxious that Tathagata will not receive you because you do wrong. A foolish being is by nature possessed of blind passion, so you must recognize

yourself as a being of karmic evil. ...
SBT-Series. *Letters of Shinran*. No. 2. p. 23.

However, Shinran also made it very clear that in living the life of O-nembutsu:

... One must seek to cast off the evil of this world and to cease doing wretched deeds; this is what it means to reject the world and to live the nembutsu. ... *Loc. cit.* No. 16, p. 52.

Shinran also "realized" that whenever:

Maddened beyond control by blind passion, we do things we should not and say things we should not and think things we should not. But if a person is deceitful in his relations with others, doing what he should not and saying what he should not because he thinks it will not hinder his birth, then it is not an instance of being maddened by passion. Since he purposely does these things, they are simply misdeeds which should never have been done. *Ibid.*

So, Shinran Shonin admonished:

Do not take poison just because there is an antidote. T. Unno. *Tannisho*. Ch. p. 24.

For, said he, it is like offering wine to someone who is already dead drunk. So a person full of transgressions and desecrations is like a person already dead drunk. Offering more wine to a drunk person only makes him more drunk and even dead drunk.

So, let us, instead, begin to enhance our lives by making the proper changes to balance our bodies with our minds, hearts and spirits. Let us make our lives simplified and unfettered by ridding our selves of excessiveness and wastefulness. For, this is what the Buddha meant when he said: "Be a lamp unto your self." Being a lamp unto one's self is also to be avoiding the extremes of "self indulgence" and "self denial."

The fifth precept, in actuality, is not to be confused with a clever scheme that pins your hopes on some contrived diet, exercise, medication or surgical procedure that suddenly overcomes your weight, dietary or health problems. Nor are the other four precepts admonishing you to refrain from killing, stealing, falsifying or committing improper sexual acts as a pre-condition to qualify for some kind of heavenly reward, or to avoid being cast into a fiery inferno by some all-knowing, all-powerful wrathful deity. In Buddhism, the Five

Precepts are about a person illuminated by the verities of Selflessness and actualities of Togetherness that bring people together instead of setting them against each other as adversaries, such as distinguishing between "believers" and "non-believers" or "saints" and "sinners."

Let me end here by quoting the words of Shinran. The first is,

Each of you should attain your birth without being misled by people and without faltering in shinjin. However, the practitioner in whom shinjin has not become settled will continue to drift, even without being misled by anyone, for he does not abide among the truly settled. SBT-Series. *Letters of Shinran*. No. 6. p. 31.

The second is:

You should understand that the moment of settling of the person who entrusts himself to Tathagata's Primal Vow is none other than the settling into the stage of non-retrogression, because he receives the benefits of being grasped, never to be abandoned. *Loc. cit.*, No. 7. p. 33.

What these words of Shinran mean is that:

... you should not think that you deserve to attain birth because you are good. You cannot be born into the true and real Buddha Land through such self-power calculation. ... *Ibid.*

Remember, March is the month of Spring Equinox, or *Haru no O'Higan*, a time when things and life are bursting out with renewed life. That is what the term "rebirth" means, "to be reborn again." So let us re-affirm our faith in Amida Buddha which is to keep undergoing and experiencing endless renewals on "transformations" in each passing moment of our lives. We are like "the evanescent petals of Sakura blossom showing their front and back sides as they are blown about to swirl and turn in Spring winds," showing our top and undersides. Namoh-amida-butsu.

BUDDHIST PASSAGE & STORY

If I were to attain Buddhahood and the sentient beings of the ten quarters, with sincere mind entrusting themselves, aspiring to be born in my land, and saying my Name even ten times, were not to be born there, then may I not attain the supreme enlightenment. Excluded are those

who commit the five grave offenses and those who slander the true dharma. SBT-Series. *Notes on the Inscriptions on Sacred Scrolls*. p. 33.

QUESTION-ANSWER KORNER

QUESTION: If Amida saves the "evil person," why then the clause in Amida's Vow that excludes people who commit the five grave transgressions and slander the Right Dharma?

ANSWER: According to Shinran Shonin, such transgressors and slanderers are not actually being excluded by Amida. It is they themselves, because of their vanities and skepticism, are, instead, born provisionally in the borderlands of the Pure Land until their blurred vision becomes fully cleared by Amida's Benevolence. Amida, in actuality, is like a birth mother hovering over her child that stubbornly keeps wandering in waywardness. Like a birth mother watching over and protecting her one and only child, Amida never forsakes or abandons especially the "evil person" until she or he attains Buddhahood. (See SBT-Series. *Notes on the Inscriptions on Sacred Scrolls*. pp. 53, 54.)

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