

VI. SHINRAN SHONIN

A. Describe Shinran Shonin's life (J-1b) (Pages VI-1, V-2, V-3, V-4)

Do the following:

- _____ 1. Read a brief description of the life of Shinran Shonin. (Page VI-5)
- _____ 2. Make a timeline to show the sequence of Shinran's life. (Pages VI-6, VI-7)

Do one of the following:

- _____ 1. List the names of Shinran Shonin's from childhood to adulthood. (Page VI-8)
- _____ 2. Do Shinran Shonin Crossword Puzzle (Page VI-9)
- _____ 3. Write a paragraph about one episode in the life of Shinran Shonin. (J-7c)
- _____ 4. Put Shinran Shonin's Life in Order (Page VI-10)

REFLECTION: Compare your life with the life of Shinran Shonin (similarities; differences).

Shinran Shonin (1173-1262 A.D.)



Introduction

We are Buddhists of the Jodo Shin Shu.

The founder of the Jodo Shin Shu was Shinran Shonin.¹

Who was this great man who explained Buddhism so all people may understand and follow the Buddha's teachings? Why is the way of Shinran called the true religion? What incidents in his life made him what he was?

¹Shonin is a title of respect and veneration given to a great religious teacher or leader of Buddhism in Japan by the people themselves and not necessarily conferred on a person through ecclesiastical action. Shonin is rather difficult to translate and perhaps the only approximate word in English may be Saint.

Important Events in the Life of Shinran Shonin

1. BIRTH

Historical evidence proves 1173 A.D. as Shinran Shonin's year of birth. The exact date is unknown.

A long tradition established and authorized by both Honganji places the date of his birth on the 1st day of the 4th month of the lunar calendar. Therefore, there is no need to deny nor correct this date for the children.

In 1887 (20th year of Meiji) Nishi Honganji translated this date of the lunar calendar into May 21 of the solar calendar. Thus, May 21, 1173 became established by tradition as Shinran Shonin's birthday.

2. DEATH OF HIS PARENTS

There are three opinions regarding his father's death.

- a. When Shinran was 4 years old his father passed away. This is a most unreasonable theory, for it is historically known that Shinran had four younger brothers.
- b. When Shinran was 8 years old, he lost his father.
- c. Shinran's father retired from society and lived longer, possible more than ten years.

Shinran's mother is said to be Kikko but she is only a legendary personage. This legend can be told to children.

3. ORDINATION

According to **Shinran Den'e** by Kakunyo, Shinran was ordained in the spring of the first year of Yowa (1181) at Sho-ren-in of Jichin. However, history proves that Jichin did not become the chief abbot of Sho-ren-in until November of that year.*

¹ The literal translation of "Toku" is "bald head" or "short hair."

4. **MONASTIC LIFE ON HIEI**

The date of Shinran's entry into the monastery is unknown. But this date is not important because Sho-ren-in belonged to the Tendai sect and Jichin himself became the chief abbot of Hiei four times. The story of "Shokoin no Monzeki" is not more than a legend transmitted to the later generations to emphasize Shinran's intelligence. All we know from the historical point of view regarding his position in the monastery is that he was a "Doso" (a priest practicing the Nembutsu in the Hall) at the Jogyodo (literally meaning — Hall of constantly walking samadhi).

Shinran's confinement at Rokkakudo for hundred days and his reception of a divine suggestion from Prince Shotoku (regarded to be the incarnation of Bodhisattva Kannon) can be acknowledged through Eshinni's letters.

5. **ENTRY INTO YOSHIMIZU**

This took place in 1201. This year is very clear because Shinran mentions it in the *Kyogyoshinsho*.

6. **SHINRAN IN OKAZAKI**

Okazaki is a place located near Yoshimizu and is the present site of the Okazaki Betsuin, belonging to the Higashi Honganji. Therefore, it might be assumed that Shinran lived around this site. However, since no details of his life there is known, it does not have to be especially emphasized.

7. **MATRIMONY WITH TAMAH**

This is a completely legendary episode. The name — Tamahi — appears for the first time in the story book entitled "Shinran Shonin Inen Hidensho" which was published about 180 years after Shinran's death.

Historically, Shinran's wife was **Eshinni**. Whether Shinran was married before he married Eshinni is subject to further study. Modern historians are inclined to deny Shinran's previous marriage.

8. **EXILE TO ECHIGO IN 1207**

This is a historical fact.

9. **REMOVAL OF THE BAN IN 1211**

This is also a historical fact. According to Shinran's words in the *Kyogyoshinsho*, Honen was pardoned on the 17th of the 11th month of 1211. It is presumed that Shinran was also released from exile at the same time.

10. **SETTLEMENT AT INADA (Hitachi Province)**

It is difficult to establish the year as 1217. It can be traced historically that he stayed in Sanuki of Kozuke Province in 1214 and entered Hitachi Province, thence possibly he proceeded to Inada via Yokozone, Takata, etc. It is impossible to say exactly when he started writing the *Kyogyoshinsho*.

11. **THE NAME OF SHINRAN**

According to the appendix of the "Tannisho," he began to use the name, Shinran, as well as "Gutoku," after he was banished to Echigo.

12. WRITING OF THE KYOGYOSHINSHO

It is probable that Shinran completed a rough draft of the Kyogyoshinsho in the year 1224. However, recently many different theories have appeared among the scholars. For the present, we can adopt the 1224 theory.

13. RETURN TO KYOTO

There is no evidence for the theory that he returned in 1232. His return is usually presumed to be sometime after he was 60 years old (60 sai amari de). His arrival in Kyoto in 1235 is also groundless.

14. DEATH

Shinran passed away on the 28th day of the 11th month of 1262 (Lunar C.)

Example:

Various Names of Shinran Throughout His Life

Matsuwaka Maro	Boyhood name.
Hannen	Name given to him by Abbot Jichin. This name was also used during his stay at Mt. Hiei.
Shakku	Name given to him by Honen.
Zenshin	Name conferred upon him by the vision of Prince Shotoku.
Yoshizane Fujii	Secular name given to him when sentenced to exile by the government.
Toku ¹ (Gutoku) Shinran	
Kenshin Daishi	Posthumous name bestowed upon Shinran by Emperor Meiji meaning "Great Master, Seer of the Truth."

Chart of significant dates in the life of Shinran. Begin this chart, too, with a blank piece of paper with only the heading.

Example:

- 1173 The year of birth (May 21st - Solar calendar).
- 1181 Ordained into the priesthood at the age of nine. Soon after the ordination rite at the Sho-ren-in Temple, he was taken to Mt. Hiei.
- 1201 He left Mt. Hiei to become a pupil of Honen in Yoshimizu, Kyoto.
- 1205 The priests of the Kofukuji Temple at Nara who were jealous of the popularity of the Nembutsu movement presented a resolution to the Imperial Court in Kyoto demanding that Honen and his disciples be severely punished.
- 1207 Exiled by the government to Echigo province.
- 1211 Pardoned from exile.
- 1224 Completed the first draft of "**Kyo-Gyo-Shin-Sho**" (Analects concerning Teaching, Practice, Faith and Attainment).
- 1232 Theoretical year of his return to Kyoto.
- 1262 Passed away in **Kyoto (Jan. 16, Solar calendar)**.

LIFE OF SHINRAN SHONIN

TIMELINE

Date/Age	Event	Name	Received from
May 21, 1173	Born near Kyoto	Matsuwaka Maro Hino Family Fujiwara Clan	Parents
1176 - 4 yrs.	Father died		
1181 - 9 yrs.	Mother died Received Tokudo (became a monk)	Hannen	Upon ordination
1201 - 29 yrs.	100-day meditation Left Mt. Hiei	Zenshin Shakku	Prince Shotoku Honen Shonin
1207 - 35 yrs.	Exiled to Echigo	Zenshin Fuji Yoshizane Gutoku "neither monk nor layman"	Forced by gov't Himself
?	Married Eshinni		
1211 - 39 yrs.	Pardoned by gov't End of exile	Shinran	Himself
1224 -1232 52 - 60 yrs.	Wrote "Kyo Gyo Shin Sho" <i>Analects Concerning the Doctrine, Practice, Faith and Attainment</i>		
Jan. 16, 1262 90 yrs.	Died		
Meiji Period 1860-1912		Kenshin Daishi	

LESSON: Students will be given blank time line study guide. Teacher tells story of Shinran's life. As age, events and names are recounted, students find the event and corresponding information which has been scrambled on the board. To evaluate learning, next class can be spent matching dates/age on a time line with events/names written on separate pieces of paper. (or 54RA pg. 287)

TIMELINE OF SHINRAN SHONIN'S LIFE

1173	
1181	
1201	
1207	Z
1211	
1224	W
1262	

Received Tokudo, admitted to priesthood

Born Matsuwakamaru May 21

Died at age 89

Hannen met Honen

Pardoned by government after 4 yrs. of exile

Zenshin exiled to Echigo

Wrote "Kyogoshinsho" at age 52. Beginning of Jodo Shinshu.

Detailed Explanation of the Various Names

Shinran Shonin is the name of the founder of the Jodo Shin Shu. However, this was not the only name he used throughout his life. Significant happenings during his life caused his name to be changed either by someone else or by himself. Since the changing of his name was for definite reasons, it would be well for the teacher and the students to understand the implications of the different names for a better appreciation of Shinran's life.

Legend tells us that at birth, his parents named him **Matsuwaka Maro**. Upon entering the priesthood at the age of nine, the head monk bestowed the name of **Hannen** upon him. The name, **Hannen**, was also used while he was at Mt. Hiei for twenty years.

When he became a disciple of Honen, he received the name **Shakku** from his master. With the approval of Honen, the name Shakku was later changed to **Zenshin** which was the name conferred upon him by the vision of Prince Shotoku.

Exiled by the government, he was denied his priestly rank and given the secular name, **Yoshizane Fujii**. However, the surname he chose for himself was **Toku**. By adopting the last name, "Toku," he declared that he was neither a monk nor a layman. The declaration that he was neither a monk tied down by the church and government nor a layman who knew nothing about Buddhism was significant in that he put himself in the free position of a real seeker of truth.

The name "Toku" was usually preceded by "Gu" which means "ignorant." Thus the name **Gutoku** was formed. While still in Echigo, he added the name **Shinran** formed from the name **Seshin** (Vasubandhu) and Donran, two great Buddhists, to whom he felt sincere regard.

For the remainder of his life, he used the full name **Gutoku Shinran**.

Today, we call him **Shinran Shonin** or by its approximate English translation **St. Shinran**.

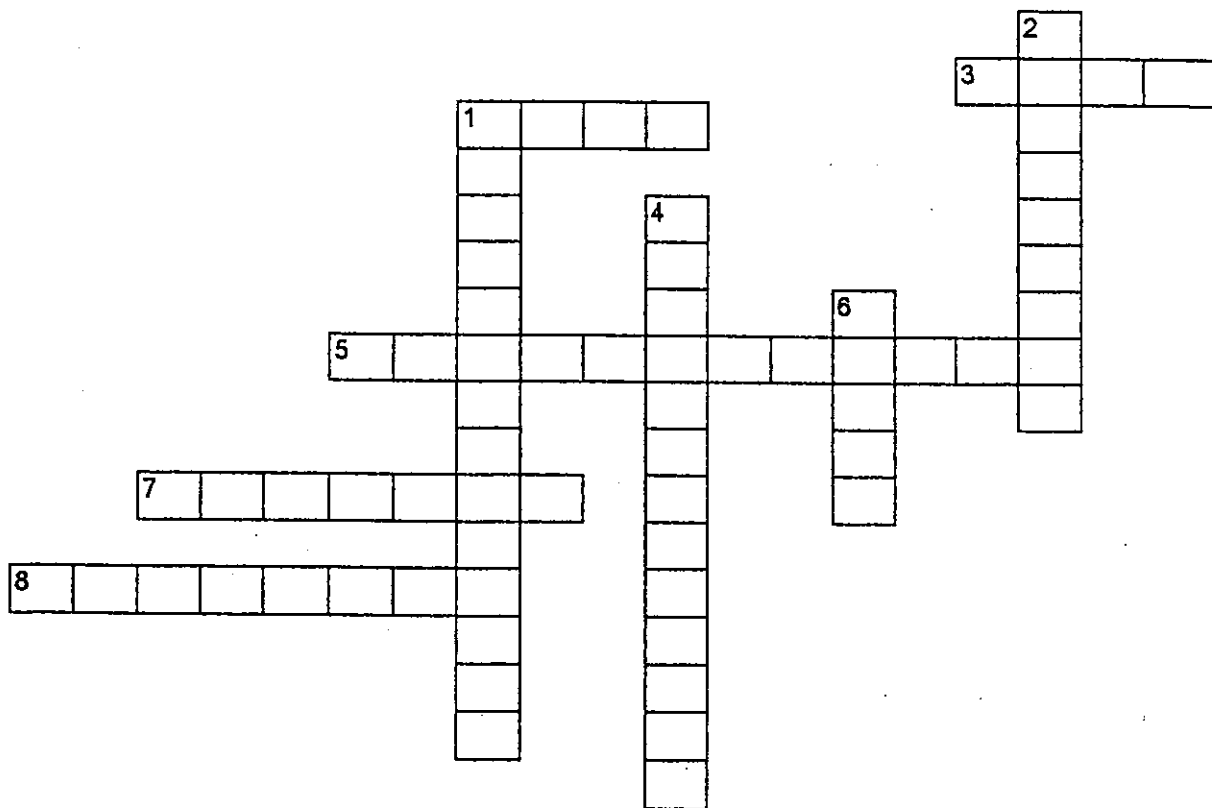
LIFE OF SHINRAN SHONIN

Down:

1. What was Shinran's first words?
2. Where did he become a Buddhist monk?
4. What vision helped him to pursue his Buddhist learning?
6. Shinran's teacher was _____.

Across:

1. He became a priest when he was only _____.
3. Shinran was _____ years old when his father died.
5. He brought the Buddhist teachings to the _____, like farmers.
7. Everyday we follow the teachings of the Buddha and _____.
8. Shinran Shonin taught people to find enlightenment through reciting the _____.



Put Shinran's Life In Order

- _____ Shinran told his uncle that he wanted to become a monk.
- _____ Sometime after 60 years of age he decided to return to Kyoto, the capital of Japan at this time.
- _____ In Echigo, Shinran married Eshin-ni.
- _____ He passed away on January 16, 1262 at the age of 90.
- _____ Shinran was born in the village of Hino near Kyoto on May 21, 1173.
- _____ He was an outstanding student and became a scholar at Mt. Hiei, the center of Buddhist studies.
- _____ After 4 years Shinran was pardoned but he did not return to Kyoto right away because he heard that his teacher, Honen, had passed away.
- _____ He gained many followers in Kanto which is now the Tokyo area.
- _____ He became a disciple of Honen.
- _____ The vision of Prince Shotoku came to him and said that the Nembutsu was the only path.
- _____ Some priests became jealous of Honen's popularity and had Honen and his disciples (among them Shinran) exiled to different parts of Japan.