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# **A STANDARD OF SHINSHU FAITH**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### A STANDARD OF SHINSHU FAITH

Part I Preparatory knowledge of Shinshu .....	3
Part II Amida Buddha .....	7
Part III Function of the Name .....	11
Part IV Relation between Name and Vow .....	15
Part V Nature of Faith .....	20
Part VI Significance of Nembutsu .....	25
Part VII Effect of Faith .....	29

### EXAMPLES OF UNORTHODOX FAITH IN SHINSHU ...34

## PART I - PREPARATORY KNOWLEDGE OF SHINSHU

### 1. What is 'Jodo Shinshu'?

'Jodo Shinshu' is the teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha as it was handed down through the religious understanding of Shinran. Shinran lived in Japan from 1173 to 1262.

### 2. Are there other names for 'Jodo Shinshu'?

'Jodo Shinshu' is abbreviated to 'Shinshu' in Japanese. In English it is often referred to as 'Shin Buddhism' or 'Shin' for short.

### 3. For what sort of people was Shinshu taught?

Shinshu is a universal teaching for all mankind. However, the chief concern of this teaching is with the spiritually ignorant and with the wrong-minded. It is not primarily concerned with gifted and holy sages.

### 4. Is Shinshu a separate religion or is it a form of Buddhism?

The teachings of Shakyamuni are divided into Mahayana (the Great Vehicle) and Hinayana (the Small Vehicle). Shinshu is a Mahayana teaching, and is certainly included within Buddhism.

### 5. Why do you include Shinshu within Mahayana?

'Mahayana' means Great Teaching or Vehicle which carries countless multitudes from Samsara to Enlightenment. Shinshu enables all sentient beings to attain Nirvana and work for the benefit of others; thus, it is a teaching identical with the principles of Mahayana.

### 6. Are there other systematisations which indicate the relation of Shinshu to Shakyamuni's teachings?

Tao-cho (Doshaku), the fourth of the Seven Patriarchs of Shinshu, classified Buddhism into the 'Sacred Path School' (Shodo-mon) and the 'Pure Land School' (Jodo-mon). Jodo Shinshu is included in the latter school. This is because Shinshu claims that perfect Enlightenment for its adherents can only be expected in the Pure Land, and that Birth into the Pure Land is attained through the Awakening of Faith by the Other Power (Tariki). The sacred Path School teaches one how to attain Enlightenment in this life by one's own power. Thus the Sacred Path School corresponds to the 'Self Power School.'

7. Is Shinshu an 'Other Power' school, then?

Yes, Shinshu can be called an 'Other Power' school because it teaches that only through the 'Other power' can we ordinary people attain Nirvana. This was emphasised first by T'an-luan (Donran), the third Patriarch of Jodo Shinshu.

8. What is meant by 'Other Power'?

Shinran defined 'Other Power' as the 'Power of the Tathagata's Vow.' Only Amida's compassionate Vow can lead us to the Awakening of Faith and then to Enlightenment. If we think we did something virtuous by our own power, we are attached to our ego. This is clearly contrary to the Buddhist teaching of 'Non-attachment,' 'Egolessness,' or 'Naturalness.'

9. Is Shinshu meaningful today?

As long as we ordinary people exist, Shinshu is meaningful. Shinshu was taught not for monks and nuns, but rather for the layman. Amida is not concerned with the sages who can transcend the secular life and attain Nirvana by their own power; this teaching is concerned with those who are bound by burning human passions and burdened with numerous worldly sufferings. The whole world around us is suffering from the crisis caused by this bottomless ego. In the unrest and

turmoil of the present world, we feel all the more that Shinshu is, because of the simplicity of practice as well as the excellence of the doctrine, the most immediate way to find the eternal, unhindered peace of mind.

10. Who is the first master who called this teaching 'Shinshu' or 'Jodo Shinshu'?

Shan-tao (Zendo), the fifth Patriarch, used the term 'Shinshu' in his writing; and Honen, the seventh Patriarch, who exclusively succeeded Shan-tao, organised his followers under the name of 'Jodoshu.' But it is Shinran himself who called this stream of Nembutsu 'Jodo Shinshu.'

11. What did Shinran mean by 'Jodo Shinshu'?

Literally 'Jodo' means 'Pure Land'; 'Shin' means 'true' and 'shu' means 'essence,' 'teaching,' or 'sect.' He meant 'True Teaching of the Pure Land School' or 'True Teaching of the Pure Land School.'

12. Then is it not the name of the sect founded by Shinran?

Not originally. Shinran himself only used this name for the 'True Teaching' transmitted to him from Honen Shonin. His intention in writing the *Kyogyoshinsho* was solely to clarify the essence of this teaching. Therefore, he had no idea of founding a new sect. He whole-heartedly respected Honen Shonin as the teacher and founder of 'Jodo-Shinshu,' However, this self-effacing attitude of Shinran brought about more respect among his followers, and spontaneously a new order came into existence. Thus those followers began to regard him as their founder and call the new order 'Jodo Shinshu.'

13. Since Shinran did not think of himself as a founder, how did his later followers set the year of the founding of 'Jodo Shinshu' as new denomination?

They gradually came to claim 1224 (The 1st Year of Gennin in the reign of Emperor Gohorikawa) as the year of the start of 'Jodo Shinshu.' In this year Shinran is assumed to have completed his main work, *Kyogyoshinsho*, in which he used the term, 'Jodo Shinshu' and revealed the Truth of this teaching.

14. In the process of the transmission of Shinshu, what is the standard to judge whether a certain view is orthodox or not?

Broadly speaking, the standard should be the Shinshu Scriptures such as the Three Basic Sutras, Commentaries of the Seven Patriarchs, the Founder's writings and statements of the succeeding Patriarchs of the Hongwanji. But the fundamental canon is the *Larger Sutra* and Shinran's own writings.

15. Are there some special points which we should notice in spreading Shinshu teachings?

Yes, for the better understanding of Shinshu and for the prevention of unorthodox faith, the Nishi Hongwanji selected a certain number of special topics for discussion of Doctrine and of Faith. The latter, including 30 topics, is called '*Anjin Rondai*' or '*Topics for Discussion on Faith*.' The original is not so easy to understand because of its classical terminology and expressions. So the writer has tried to sum up the main points of these topics and rearranged them with the hope that it would become a helpful guide for those voluntarily working for the spreading of Shinshu in the West.

## PART II - AMIDA BUDDHA

### 1. In Shinshu what is the object of reverence?

Shin followers have absolute Faith in Amida Buddha alone. However, they also revere and respect other Buddhas because all Buddhas are essentially one with Amida Buddha.

### 2. What kind of Buddha is Amida?

Linguistically, 'Amida' is a transliteration of the Sanskrit word 'Amita,' which means 'infinite.' 'Amita' in Sanskrit is compounded with 'abha' which means light, or 'ayus', which means life. Thus we have the names 'Amitabha' and 'Amitayus'; i.e. 'Infinite Light' and 'Infinite Life' respectively. The names reveal that Amida is the Buddha of Infinite Light and Life.

### 3. What is the meaning of 'Buddha'?

'Buddha' means 'The Awakened One,' or 'He who has attained Perfect Enlightenment.'

### 4. Is Amida Buddha a creator of the world? Or a ruler, or a judge?

Buddhism denies all such views. It teaches the theories of 'Karma,' 'Impermanency,' 'Egolessness,' 'Interdependence,' etc., and explains the origination and changes of all existences. Amida Buddha appears to be a creator and a ruler of the world, but actually not. He is the one who has comprehended the reality of the Universe, and in Shinshu He is understood to be the manifestation of the 'Dharma-nature' itself; He has perfect Wisdom and Compassion, and so does not give any punishment even to those who do not follow His teaching immediately; having absolute Compassion, He untiringly tries to prompt such people to become gradually aware of His universal Vow and the real nature of Dharma.

## 5. How many Buddhas exist?

The sutras state that the number of Buddhas in the three time periods of past, present and future is infinite, surpassing the number of grains of sand in the Ganges River. Buddhism teaches that all sentient beings possess the potentiality of becoming a Buddha; thus, it is natural that countless Buddhas come into existence.

## 6. What is the nature of Amida Buddha?

To answer this question, we must first understand the Three Bodies or 'Triakaya' (Four Bodies are also taught; in this case the Transformed Body is derived from the Accommodated Body). The three bodies are Dharmakaya (the Law Body), Sambhogakaya (Recompensed Body) and Nirmanakaya (Accommodated Body). 'Nirmanakaya' is represented by Shakyamuni as the historical Buddha who appeared in this world in physical form. 'Sambhogakaya' is the Buddha who attained the fruition of Enlightenment by perfectly fulfilling vow and practice. Amida Buddha is a Sambhogakaya; He established forty-eight vows and by His practice, brought them to consummation, and attained Buddhahood.

## 7. What is the nature of the Dharmakaya?

'Dharmakaya' is the ultimate Truth itself; it is revealed in and through the Sambhogakaya and again manifests itself historically as the Nirmanakaya.

## 8. Are there any other names for this stage of Buddhahood?

The Dharmakaya is identical with what is called 'Thusness,' 'Oneness,' 'Dharma-nature,' 'Nirvana,' etc; this status was also expressed by T'an-luan (Donran) as 'Law Body of Dharma-nature' when he expounded the 'Twofold Law Body' (Nishu Hosshin).

## 9. Why is the Dharmakaya not worshipped actually in Shinshu?

Dharmakaya absolutely transcends space and time. It cannot be grasped through man's senses; it exists beyond human conception, words, and intellection. Religion, however, requires something closer to humanity; something more concrete. And that concrete manifestation is the Sambhogakaya known as Amida Buddha in Shinshu.

#### 10. What is the 'Twofold Law Body'?

This is another analysis of Buddhahood which was expounded by T'an-luan (Donran). The Twofold Law Body refers to the 'Hossho Hosshin' (the Law Body of Dharma-nature) and 'Hoben Hosshin' (the Law Body of Expediency). He explained that all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas possess these two aspects and that these two aspects are necessary in the salvation of the sentient beings.

#### 11. How are they related to the Three Bodies?

The 'Law Body of Dharma-nature' is identical with the Dharmakaya or 'Law Body,' and the 'Law Body of Expediency' corresponds to the Sambhogakaya or 'Recompensed Body.'

#### 12. What is the difference between the 'Recompensed Body' and the 'Law Body of Expediency'?

In essence there is no difference. The two names, however, refer to two different aspects of Amida Buddha. For example, the 'Recompensed Body' refers to the process that Dharmakara (Hozo) became Amida Buddha in recompense for His Vow and Practice which brought that Vow to perfect fulfilment. The 'Law Body of Expediency' expresses the truth that Amida Buddha is the manifestation of the formless, invisible, transcendent Dharma-nature in the form and name. This manifestation of Oneness is also called 'Tathagata' or 'Thus-come.' The Buddha who resides in this stage manifests excellent characteristics; He reveals himself through the

Name, 'Namo-Amida-Butsu.' He has realised all His vows through practice. Both the vow and the attainment take place within the framework of cause-and-effect, and conform to the 'Recompensed Body'. Therefore, in spite of superficial differences, the 'Recompensed Body' and the 'Law Body of Expediency' must be considered as essentially the same.

13. Where does the Buddha of this stage abide?

The *Larger Sutra* teaches that Amida Buddha established the Western Pure Land for the sake of all suffering beings and it is here that Amida himself abides.

14. How can we ordinary people recognise Amida?

That is a vital religious question. Many sages affirm that Amida Buddha can be apprehended through meditative practices, by the highly gifted and diligent saint. However, Shinran realised that for common mortals, their views being clouded by their human passions, this was an impossibility. Therefore, the great masters of the Pure Land School emphasised the Sacred Name of Amida Buddha, 'Namo-Amida-Butsu,' in which the infinite virtues of Amida are embodied. Only through the Name can the common mortal with his defilement and ignorance, come to realise His Compassion and become one with Him. And through His Compassion, common mortals become endowed with His Infinite Life and Light.

## PART III - FUNCTION OF THE NAME

### 1. What is the doctrinal position of the Name (Myogo) in Shinshu?

The position of the Name, 'Namo-Amida-Butsu' is vitally important in Shinshu teaching. Without this Name, Shinshu could not be established, for it is the core of Amida's Vow.

### 2. How and where does Amida mention His Name?

Amida vows in the Seventeenth Vow that His Name shall be praised and recited by all Buddhas, and thereby it shall be known and recited by all sentient beings. He also vows in the Eighteenth Vow that all sentient beings who believe in and recite His Name will unfailingly be born in His Pure Land. These vows were brought to consummation through a long period of discipline.

### 3. Why did Amida select the Name as the most expedient means of saving all beings?

There are two reasons at least: 1) The Name is easy for ordinary people to hear, believe and recite, while other practices such as the Six Paramitas or meditative Nembutsu are limited to persons of high intelligence; 2) The Name is excellent in value, for it was accomplished by Amida's sincere Vow and Practice; therefore, it embodies within itself His absolute good and virtue.

### 4. Easiness of the Nembutsu can be understood, but it is rather hard to understand why Amida's Vow and Practice have produced the excellence of the Name.

In this world, a name does not necessarily represent reality. A name is a symbol. It would seem that Amida's is just a name and nothing more. From the spiritual and religious standpoint, His Name is not just an empty name; nor is His Vow like an unreliable human promise. Buddha's Enlightenment is indeed the perfection of Wisdom and Compassion. By the realisation of spiritual, intuitive Wisdom He

comprehended the ultimate truth of Thusness and by the activities of His absolute Compassion He manifested His Enlightenment in this Name, as the medium of communication with all common mortals. As Shinran emphasised, this Name embodies Amida's total virtue; again it represents the ultimate Dharma just as it is. Thus there can be no separation between the Sacred Name and the reality of Dharma-nature.

5. Then may we consider the Name as a stage of Buddhahood?

The Name is the only way in which Amida comes into contact with ordinary people in this world, i.e. for us, the Name, 'Namo-Amida-Butsu' is the only aspect of Buddha which we can feel within the limits of our human experience.

6. 'Thusness' (Law Body of Dharma-nature) becomes 'Tathagata' (Law Body of Expediency) to come closer to human life; and again 'Tathagata' manifests himself in the 'Name' to become the direct focus of our Faith and recitation. These three steps of Amida's approach to sentient beings, however, seem to be considerably different from the 'Three Bodies.' Why did Shinran adopt the former and put special emphasis on it?

The first two steps of His approach were first introduced by T'an-luan (Donran). But Shinran emphasised the significance of the Name as well. In fact, he thought that where there is the Name, there is Buddha; and whenever he recited the Nembutsu he felt as if he could meet his spiritual parent.

7. Then, is the idea of 'Three Bodies' not so meaningful in Shinshu? Did Shinran not respect Shakyamuni Buddha as the Nirmanakaya?

Shinran also adopted the idea of 'Three Bodies,' and needless to say, he showed reverence to Shakyamuni as the founder of Buddhism. Apparently Amida and Shakyamuni are two different Buddhas. Amida is an eternal Buddha, while Shakyamuni is a historical

Buddha with a physical body; Amida proclaimed the Eighteenth Vow as the best way for all sentient beings to attain Buddhahood, but Shakyamuni taught innumerable ways to lead all kinds of people; Amida calls from His Pure Land, while Shakyamuni encourages us, from this world, to go to the realm of Nirvana. In spite of such differences, these two Buddhas are essentially one, because the Enlightenment of all Buddhas is the same. Besides, in Shinshu Shakyamuni is believed to be the Nirmanakaya of Amida Buddha. Thus, according to Shinran's view, Shakyamuni appeared in this world solely to teach Amida's Compassionate Vow. Therefore, to emphasise the significance of Amida's Name is to follow Shakyamuni's teaching faithfully.

8. Are these three stages of Buddha essentially different from one another?

No. Essentially these three are one and the same. The substance of each is Thusness - the water in the lake can be whipped into waves but in essence, the waves are still water.

9. It has been understood that the Name reveals Dharma itself. What are the other functions of the Name?

Since the Name is the manifestation of Dharma-nature, in a religious and spiritual sense the Name represents Amida's Compassionate Vow to save all sentient beings. Thus, Rennyo Shonin, the eighth Patriarch of the Hongwanji, states in his *Letters*, '*Amida Tathagata made a Vow called Namu-Amida-Butsu.*' In this case, he meant by 'Namu-Amida-Butsu' that 'those who have Faith will be unfailingly saved by Amida's saving power.'

10. What is the relationship of the Name to the Awakening of Faith?

Our Faith is established when Amida's Compassion is received by our mind through the Name. Thus, the Name is vitally necessary for the Awakening of Faith; our minds are always changeable, but the Name

can be trusted. For this reason Shinran Shonin said in the *Kyogyoshinsho* that *'The essence of our Faith is indeed the Honoured Name of the supreme virtue.'* Rennyo Shonin also said, *'It should be known that even Obtaining Faith is assured in the Name of Six Characters'; Faith does not exist separately outside the Six Characters.'*

11. The Name might be of great value for those who comprehend it: Why are there so many people who are unaware of its significance?

It is due to their immature conditioning for the Awakening of Faith. The past conditions differ with each person. However, Buddhas are always trying to influence each person by every possible means including the preaching through the sutras and even invisible and inaudible cultivation. This is the purpose of the Seventeenth Vow of Amida. And because of the working of all Buddhas, even such people who are unaware of Amida Buddha yet will come, sooner or later, to believe in His Benevolence and recite the Nembutsu. This is the religious life proclaimed in the Eighteenth Vow.

## PART IV - RELATION BETWEEN NAME AND VOW

1. Amida's Compassion and His practical method of salvation are often explained through His Vow. What is Amida's Vow?

The 'Vow' or more exactly the 'Original Vow' is the translation of the Sanskrit word 'Purva-pranidhana' and the Japanese word 'Hongan.' Generally, Bodhisattvas arouse some vows and bring them to consummation through their sincere difficult practice, to save suffering beings, thus enabling themselves to attain Buddhahood as well.

2. Are all vows the same?

There are two kinds; the common and the special vows.

3. What are common vows?

The common vows are so named because these are basic and common to all Bodhisattvas, and are concretely known by the name of 'Shiguzeigan' or the 'Four Universal Vows.'

4. What are Amida's Special Vows?

According to the *Larger Sutra*, Amida, in His causal rank, made the forty-eight vows in order to deliver all suffering beings. As these vows particularly represent Amida's Compassion, they are called His special vows. However, of these forty-eight vows, the Eighteenth Vow is the most essential and representative vow. Accordingly, in most cases in Shinshu, the term 'Hongan' or the 'Original Vow' is used to designate this main vow.

5. If so, may we understand Amida's special vows to have two meanings?

Exactly. The first meaning of 'Hongan' is the 'Causal Vow.' In this case, it refers to all of the forty-eight vows; these vows were all effectuated by His practice of myriad periods. In contrast to this 'Effect' each of the forty-eight vows can be called the 'Causal Vow.' The second meaning of 'Hongan' is the 'Main Vow' and it refers only to the Eighteenth Vow. The latter meaning is more prevalent in Shinshu.

## 6. What is the Eighteenth Vow?

As mentioned before, the Eighteenth Vow is the most important vow of Amida's forty-eight vows; it is in this vow that Amida proclaimed the actual way of Birth in His country for the sake of sentient beings. The passage reads as follows:

*'Upon my attainment of Buddhahood, if the beings of the ten quarters who have Sincere Mind, Serene Faith, and Wish to be born in my country, with even ten utterances, would not be born therein, may I not attain the Highest Enlightenment; only those are excepted who have committed the Five Deadly Sins and who have abused the Right Dharma.'*

## 7. What is the main point of this vow?

Shinran called this vow *'The Vow of Sincere, Serene Faith.'* This means that Faith is the core of the Eighteenth Vow. Besides, according to Shinran, this Faith, sincere and serene, comes from Amida's Wisdom and Compassion, and because of this, this true Faith can be the cause for Birth in the Pure Land. From this true Faith, the Utterance of the Name spontaneously comes out whenever one feels happy and grateful to Buddha. This Utterance of the Name, however, is not the condition for Birth nor Nirvana but is solely the expression of innermost Faith and gratitude. Such a pure, egoless and easy practice is the Nembutsu vowed in the Eighteenth Vow.

## 8. What is the difference between Name and Vow?

The Vow is Amida's desire and resolution to save all beings. In this Vow He selected the Name so that sentient beings can wholeheartedly believe in and easily recite it. After His sincere and hard discipline, He brought this Vow to perfection, and thus the Name became the only and best medium for common mortals to communicate with the Buddha. In other words, the Name is the fruition of the Vow. After all, the Vow refers to the 'cause,' while the Name is the 'effect' of the Vow.

9. How do we understand the oneness of the Name and Vow?

Because of the reliability of the Buddha, His Name and His Vow cannot be separated from each other. The Vow refers to Amida's Compassionate Mind, through which the Name was accomplished as the practical and expedient method to save all sentient beings. The Name, on the other hand, can be meaningful only when it is recited on the basis of True Faith in this Vow. Therefore, in Shinshu, to believe in His Name is at once to believe in His Vow; to listen to the significance of the Name is at once to listen to the significance of His merciful Vow. After all, either the Name or the Vow may be mentioned as the object of our 'Listening' and 'Faith.'

10. Are both the Vow and the Name necessary for Amida Buddha to save us?

Certainly. Without the Vow, the Name would be empty; and without the Name, the Vow would be fruitless. For the Accomplishment of salvation, the Vow and Name are of vital necessity on the part of the Savior, and the Faith and the Nembutsu are their reflections on the side of the devotee.

11. It is usually said that Amida's Compassion is unlimited and immeasurable. It seems to be so as far as we refer to the first sentence of the Eighteenth Vow. However, the remaining part of the passage impresses us that He will not save those beings who have committed

such evils as the Five Deadly Sins or the Abuse of Right Dharma. Why is it so?

Apparently it seems to exclude those grave sins. However, according to Shan-tao (Zendo), this is not eternal exclusion but is only the warning which He has given for those who have the potentiality of committing such grave sins; therefore when those sins have been actually committed, Amida, far from forsaking them, will save those people without any hesitation. The warning comes from His Wisdom, and the universal salvation is due to His Compassion.

12. Did Shinran have the same idea too?

Yes, he expanded Shan-tao's theory. He paid special attention to the fact that the 'exclusion' appears only in the Eighteenth Vow and that this Vow was primarily for those persons who might easily commit such grave sins. Thus he stated in His writing, *Songo-Shinzo-Meimon*, that this 'exclusion' only shows for what kind of beings the Eighteenth Vow was made, and that it paradoxically tells us that even such evil persons, being the very object of Amida's concern, will be saved without fail. After all, this warning shows Amida's unlimited concern for all beings instead of His real and eternal exclusion of such evil persons.

13. Are there any other important vows besides the Eighteenth Vow?

The Eleventh, Twelfth, Thirteenth, Seventeenth, and Twenty-second Vows are also important ones. The Eleventh Vow is the vow in which those who have Faith are assured of unending attainment of Nirvana. The Twelfth and Thirteenth Vows respectively promise the unlimitedness of His Light and Life. This means that the light and life of anyone who has attained Buddhahood are also unlimited. The Seventeenth Vow promises that Amida's Name shall be praised and widely proclaimed by all Buddhas. The Name is, indeed, the object of our Faith and recitation as taught in the Eighteenth Vow. These five vows constitute the whole process - from the first listening to the

ultimate goal of Nirvana; Shinran called them '*Five True Vows.*'  
Lastly, the Twenty-second Vow assures us that we will possess, upon attainment of Buddhahood, powers to benefit all beings. Actually, all these vows are implied in the Eighteenth Vow already. Therefore, we can say that the Eighteenth Vow alone is the main Vow.

## PART V - NATURE OF FAITH

### 1. What is Faith?

In Jodo Shinshu, Faith is particularly emphasised as the most important aspect of its teaching. Of the various interpretations by Shinran, his psychological interpretation defines Faith as 'No-doubt mind,' 'Un-double-mindedness,' 'One Mind,' or 'Single-heartedness.'

### 2. Where is Faith proclaimed in the Shinshu scriptures?

It is mentioned in many places throughout the scriptures. Of these, Shinshu particularly takes notice of the one mentioned in the Eighteenth Vow. The Vow states, *'If the beings of the ten quarters who have Sincere Mind, Serene Faith, and Wish to be born in my Country ....'* Sincere Mind, Serene Faith and Wish to be born are usually called the 'Three Minds' of the Eighteenth Vow. Although they are separately named they are but different aspects of one concrete Faith. Thus according to Shinran, these Three Minds may be represented by 'One Mind' or Serene Faith. When they are represented by Serene Faith, Sincere Mind and Wish to be born are implied in it as its essence and significance.

### 3. Why is emphasis of One Mind necessary? And where did the term originate?

It was Vasubandhu who used One Mind to express his Single-hearted Faith in Amida Buddha. Shinran admired Vasubandhu's usage as an excellent means to make common people understand Faith easily.

### 4. If One Mind is easier to understand, why did Amida proclaim Three Minds in the Eighteenth Vow?

Shinran gave a detailed interpretation of this problem in the Volume of Faith in the *Kyogyoshinsho*. According to this explanation Three Minds are at once One Mind; One Mind is used to show the easiness and single-heartedness of our Faith in Amida: Three Minds are used

to reveal the essence and origin of this single-hearted Faith as we experience it.

#### 5. What was Shinran's interpretation of Three minds?

As the cause for Birth in Amida's Pure Land, all sentient beings are seemingly urged to gain Three Minds. It is, for example, very reasonable for beings to have Sincere Mind as a condition to be born in the Pure Land. Shinran realised, however, that such perfect, absolute sincerity cannot be expected by common mortals. Furthermore, judging from the nature of the Vow, he conceived that Amida's Compassion will not expect such impossible requisites from poorly-gifted common mortals. Thus, Shinran concluded that this Sincere Mind in the Eighteenth Vow is not what Amida requires us to have as a condition for our Birth, but rather the Sincere Mind of Amida Buddha who consummated His Vow and established the Pure Land. It then becomes apparent that the above mentioned Sincere Mind is in reality a gift of Amida Buddha. In the same manner, Serene Faith was interpreted by Shinran as Amida's confidence to save all beings; Wish for Birth as His Compassionate calling which convinces them of His Pure Land. Thus all Three Minds are to be attributed to Amida's virtue and are given to all beings as True Faith in the condensed form of One Mind. For this reason Shinran paraphrased the Japanese characters 'shin' 'jin' (believing mind) as 'true mind,' and interpreted Faith as the 'Faith of the Other power.'

#### 6. What is meant by 'Faith of the Other Power'?

Shinran explained in the *Kyogyoshinsho* that Other Power is the Power of Tathagata's Vow. From this explanation the Faith of the Other Power can be understood to mean the Faith bestowed by the Benevolence of Amida's Eighteenth Vow. These implications and the interpretations of Faith are the unique characteristics of Shinshu teaching.

#### 7. What is the function of Faith?

Faith is the true cause for being born in the Pure Land and attaining to Nirvana. Shinran strongly emphasised the merits of Faith particularly from this point.

8. Why can Faith be the cause for the Pure Land and Nirvana?

Faith is awakened when one receives Amida's Compassionate and Sincere Mind. At that moment His absolute virtues become one's own through the Sacred Name, 'Namo-Amida-Butsu,' thus assuring one the highest state of Nirvana.

9. If Buddha's virtues bring our Enlightenment, it appears to differ from the Buddhist theory of 'self-cause, self-effect.' What is the relationship between the Law of Causality and Amida's salvation?

His salvation is in accord with the fundamental ideas of Mahayana Buddhism, e.g. 'compassionate activities,' 'benefiting others,' 'merit-transference,' etc., and certainly such activities are done within the framework of 'cause and effect.'

Amida accomplished the Name for our sake as the decisive seed for Nirvana. If it were not transferred to us, and we were still brought to Buddhahood, then Amida's salvation would be a miracle which transcends the law of causality. The reality is, however, that His pure virtue is accepted by Faith within ourselves and it becomes our own cause to bear such fruition. So it is not against the law of 'self-cause, self-effect.'

10. Why does Shinshu not teach a miracle?

Amida Buddha is the manifestation of Dharma-nature (ultimate Law) itself. And theories of 'Cause and effect,' 'Inter-dependence of all existences,' 'Void,' 'Impermanency,' 'Egolessness' etc. are the most fundamental truths of the universe clarified by Buddhism. If Amida showed a miracle contrary to the Laws of 'Cause and effect,' it would mean the death of Amida himself.

11. If Faith is the true cause, is any other practice necessary for liberation?

According to the Shinshu doctrine, no other practice is required. The *Tannisho* explains the reason by saying, *'If we have Faith in the Original Vow, no other good is needed because there is no good surpassing the Nembutsu. Nor should evil be feared, because there is no evil capable of obstructing Amida's Original Vow,'* (Chap. 1) The *Kyogyoshinsho* also says *'The True cause for Nirvana is Faith alone'.* (Vol. of Faith)

12. What is the meaning of 'Nishu-jinshin' (The Twofold Profound Conviction) taught by Shan-tao (Zendo)?

The teaching of 'Nishu-jinshin' is to demonstrate the twofold conviction contained in Shinshu Faith. The twofold conviction are:

1) deep conviction that we are foolish beings of karmic evils who have passed through many illusory lives from the remote past, and have no hope for self-deliverance; thus we are destined only to hell;

and

2) deep comprehension that the Forty-eight Vows of Amida Buddha will save us without any discrimination and those who believe in the Vows will be born unfailingly.

The former is the deep insight into human nature as it is; the latter is the single-hearted reliance on Amida's Compassion which never forsakes any sentient being.

13. How are these two related to each other?

They are two attributes of one concrete Faith of Shinshu; they cannot be separated.

14. Do they arise at the same time or one after another? By 'self-power' or 'Other Power'?"

They arise at the same time. The self introspection made by 'self-power' is not perfect. Only through the second conviction - wholehearted trust in Amida's Compassion - can one attain true insight into human nature as it is. Both of them are awakened by the Other-Power; these two are the vital attributes of a concrete Faith in Shinshu.

15. Deep conviction concerning Amida's Vow may continue forever. How about the conviction that we are foolish beings of karmic evils destined for hell? Does it continue even after the Awakening of Faith?

It lasts till the end of life, because human nature itself does not change even after Faith, as a stone remains a stone even after it is placed in a boat. The only change is that after Faith, we, being illuminated by Amida's absolute Light, become more aware of our own karmic evil and always express our feelings of repentance and gratitude through the Nembutsu.

## PART VI - SIGNIFICANCE OF NEMBUTSU

1. If Faith is the true cause for Birth and Enlightenment, what is the nature of the Nembutsu?

Nembutsu in Shinshu is the manifestation of inner Faith, i.e. the spontaneous expression of gratitude to Amida for having saved us. Just as Faith is awakened by the Other-Power, the Nembutsu is also awakened by the Other-Power. Accordingly there should not be attachment to our own action of utterance.

2. How can you say that? The expression in the Eighteenth Vow appears to require the Nembutsu as a condition for Birth in His country.

The term 'naishi' (amtashas in Skt.) is added to 'junen' (dasha citta in Skt.). In the tradition of the Pure Land School, 'junen' is understood as 'ten utterances' and 'naishi' as 'even' or 'even unto.' Shinran interpreted 'naishi' in his writings and stated that 'naishi' is the word implying 'many and one.' 'Naishi' does not limit the number of Nembutsu or the length of time. Thus, 'naishi junen' does not necessarily mean exactly ten utterances; it implies any number between the countless utterances and even one utterance. This kind of Nembutsu cannot be the condition or the cause; it is only the spontaneous expression of the innermost Faith, as Shinran said in the *Kyogyoshinsho*, 'The true Faith is necessarily followed by the Name.'

3. Then should we not regard the Nembutsu as our own merit?

No. The egoless Nembutsu comes from Amida's Benevolence as in the case of Faith. The *Tannisho* says, 'The Nembutsu is non-practice and non-good for those who practice it.' (Chap. 8) This means that we should not get attached to our own utterance of the Name. The *Tannisho* also states that, 'In the Nembutsu, non-discrimination is its essence because it is above praise, inexplicable and inconceivable.'

(Chap. 10) 'Non-discrimination,' 'Egolessness' or 'Whole-hearted trust' is the basic attitude of 'Thus have I heard.'

4. Do Faith and Nembutsu appear at the same time? If not, which comes first?

Faith is awakened first, and just then our Birth is determined. There will be no room for the utterance of the Name to break into this moment. Nembutsu will follow the awakening of Faith; it will appear aloud or softly, continuously or intermittently whenever the feeling of joy and gratitude arises in the mind.

5. In the *Tannisho*, Shinran expressed his Faith, saying *that 'Shinran ... entrusted himself to the teaching of the Venerable Master (Honen) --- that we are saved by Amida merely through the utterance of the Nembutsu.'* Does this not contradict the above explanation on Faith and Nembutsu?

The teaching of Honen or Shan-tao (Zendo) was characterised by the emphasis on the Nembutsu in contrast to other sundry practices as required in different schools. However, the Nembutsu in Shan-tao's and Honen's teachings is the utterance of Amida's Name based upon true Faith. It is not the Nembutsu of self-power but it represents Amida's characteristic method of salvation as proclaimed in the Vow. Shinran used this expression, too, especially when he referred to Shan-tao's or Honen's teaching.

6. Is Nembutsu the 'expression of gratitude' or the 'Great Practice?' We utter the Nembutsu spontaneously as the expression of happiness and gratitude, so we do not find any merit in our own utterance. Essentially speaking, however, the absolute virtue embodied in the Sacred Name itself is the 'Great Practice,' which was accomplished by Amida and is in accord with 'Thusness' as stated in the Volume on Practice, by Shinran Shonin.

7. Is this Nembutsu the utterance of the 'Six-character-Name' or the 'Nine-' or 'Ten-Character-Name'?

The Six-character-Name, 'Na-mo-a-mi-da-butsu,' is the most popular. However, it is historically known that Shinran and his disciples occasionally recited the Nine- or Ten-character-Name. The Nine-character-Name refers to 'Na-mo-fu-ka-shi-gi-ko-nyo-rai' (Homage to the Tathagata of Inconceivable Light) and the Ten-character-Name to 'Ki-myo-jin-ji-po-mu-ge-ko-nyo-rai' (Homage to the Tathagata of Unimpeded Light Pervading the Ten Quarters). Both of these are concerned with the obeisance to and trust in Amida Buddha, and accordingly do not differ from the content of the Six-character-Name.

8. Is this Nembutsu in Japanese or in English?

The Six-character-Name is the transliteration of the Sanskrit word into Chinese characters. Later it came to be spelled in Japanese or European letters. As for the Nine- and Ten-character-Names, these are all Chinese except the term 'Namo' (Namas in Skt.). As Shinran Shonin is believed to have recited these Chinese-translation-Names as well, no doubt we may utter the Nembutsu in Japanese, in English or any other language. The vital Point is that there should be true Faith as the basis of the Nembutsu.

9. Must the Nembutsu have a special form, or can it be recited in more simplified forms?

There have appeared many forms of the Nembutsu in the long history of Buddhist practice, but Shinshu does not require any formal recitation except in the case of Sutra chanting. Some people may recite it regularly, 'Na-mo-a-mi-da-butsu,' and some in irregular form, 'Na-man-da-butsu.' According to the circumstances, they might not have the time to utter more than a single syllable like 'Nah' or 'Ah.' Again, certain persons might not be able to give voice to the Nembutsu but would have to speak it silently. These superficial differences, however, are not concerned with the value of the

Nembutsu at all, because all the merits are embodied in the Sacred Name itself, and not in the form of its recitation.

## PART VII - EFFECT OF FAITH

### 1. What are the effects of Shinshu Faith?

There are two. One is the 'Benefit of Attaining Nirvana'; the other is the 'Benefit of Abiding in The Rank of the Assured.' These two benefits are vowed in the eleventh Vow.

### 2. What is Nirvana?

Nirvana is a Sanskrit word which means 'extinction' (of the flame of lust) or 'emancipation' (from Samsara or birth and death). Mahayana Buddhism views it as the status of absolute freedom and tranquility. It is a synonym of Buddhahood and refers to the final goal of Buddhist life. Sometimes this term is used to mean Shakyamuni's death, this is because Shakyamuni as Nirmanakaya was believed to have returned to eternal and perfect Nirvana with his physical death.

### 3. What is the 'Rank of the Assured'?

It is the state in which those who have true Faith are assured of Birth in the Pure Land and attainment of Nirvana. This rank is called 'Shojoju' in Japanese, and it is identical with 'Futaiten' or 'Non-retrogressive State.' The term was originally used for the first of the 'Ten Ranks of Bodhisattvahood.' However, Shinran interpreted it as the benefit which is given by Amida at the moment of the Awakening of Faith.

### 4. Does it mean that a portion of Buddhahood is realised in this rank?

As long as our physical body lasts and evil karmas still work day by day, we cannot become Buddha. We remain ordinary persons filled with sufferings and passions until our life's end. The only change is that as the cause for Buddhahood has been received, the root of the evil Karma is severed and thus it does not carry its effect into the next life.

5. What happens if we are disturbed by passions and pains on our death-bed?

Nothing happens. Whether we suffer from unrest and agony or keep mindfulness does not make any difference. Since Buddha's absolute virtue has been received through Faith and we are already in His 'All-embracing and Non-forsaking Light,' we are sure to be born in His Land regardless of our mental condition on the death-bed. And in the instant of Birth in the Pure Land, we become Buddha.

6. Does Shinshu set forth any practical benefits of Faith besides the ultimate attainment, i.e. Buddhahood?

Shinran states in the *Kyogyoshinsho* that those who have the diamond-hard, true Faith unflinchingly obtain the 'Ten Benefits' in the present life. The 'Rank of the assured' is one of these.

7. Why was this benefit mentioned and were the other nine benefits neglected in the Eleventh Vow?

The 'Benefit of Abiding in the Rank of the Assured' is the most fundamental of these ten benefits, the remaining nine are the benefits which were derived from it. These individual and concrete benefits, however, represent what Shinran called the 'Innumerable Benefits' in another text. The number of the benefits should not be of concern.

8. Do they include any material benefits?

No. Buddhists do not pray to Buddha for any material gains, nor do they expect any miracle. They only try to conform to the Law of Causality and endeavour with right views to better their lives. For such sincere efforts Faith in Amida may give not only spiritual encouragement but also material benefits, but such material effects are not specially demonstrated; farmers harvest wheat and naturally get straw but obtaining straw is not the main purpose. The benefits of 'Being protected by all Buddhas'; 'Being protected by Invisible Beings'; 'Being praised by all Buddhas'; 'Being always protected by

His Spiritual Light'; and 'Having welling Joy in mind' are some examples to show how Shnshu Faith helps us enjoy a happy life.

9. Is there any benefit concerned with moral effect in the Ten Benefits?

Amida's Compassion transcends even morality; He saves all beings without any discrimination of good and evil. Besides, the purpose of the Awakening of Faith is wholly to receive Amida's Compassion and thus attain Enlightenment, not mere moral improvement. However, it is also true that Shinshu Faith, far from being anti-moral, has a moral influence on human life, although the devotee himself is not necessarily conscious of it. For example, there is the Benefit of 'Turning evil into good.' To turn evil into good is indeed the highest ideal in moral life and is the essence of Mahayana Buddhism. Shinshu shows that it is practicable for all people through receiving Amida's absolute good and virtue. The Benefits of 'Being awakened to Amida's Benevolence and having a desire to repay what we owe'; 'Always doing works of Great Compassion'; and 'Being possessed of the Highest Virtue;' seem to be concerned with a moral effect although they can be actualised only through Amida's working and are not always perceptible to sentient beings. All those benefits, after all, come from the 'Benefit of Abiding in the Rank of the Assured' which is the basis of our feelings of hopefulness, relief, happiness, joy or gratitude.

10. Where can Nirvana be obtained?

The self-power schools claim that Nirvana can be attained even in this world if one accumulates pure good and awakens absolute wisdom in oneself. The Pure Land schools realise Nirvana through Amida's Compassion after Birth in the Pure Land. According to the conviction of the latter school, it is difficult for man to accomplish such saintly disciplines in this mundane world.

11. What is the significance of Birth in the Pure Land?

Shinran emphasised that Birth in the Pure Land is 'Birthless Birth' which means the end of samsara, and, that Birth itself is indeed the realisation of Nirvana; other sects of the Pure Land School, on the other hand, state that Nirvana can be achieved after a long period of further practice in the Pure Land itself; for them the Pure Land is, as it were, a suitable location where one can study without any fear of retrogression to the lower grades of the path.

12. The literal meaning of Nirvana seems to be rather negative. Is there a positive nature of Nirvana?

To attain Nirvana is to complete Buddhahood. Buddhahood means the perfection of absolute Wisdom and Compassion both for oneself and for all others. On the basis of this, Shinran stressed the deep significance of two kinds of merit-transference, namely, 'Merit-transference of Going Forward' (Oso-Eko) and 'Merit-transference of Coming Backward' (Genso-Eko). The former means that Amida transfers His own merit to enable us to attain Buddhahood (perfection of Wisdom for one-self). The latter shows that it is also through His Merit-transference that one who has attained Buddhahood is given a special power to return to the defiled worlds and save all beings (perfection of Compassion for others). 'Oso-Eko' is promised in the Eleventh Vow and 'Genso-Eko' in the Twenty-second Vow.

13. What about the view that Shin followers should perform the activities of 'Genso-Eko' in this present life, not only after death?

According to orthodox Shinshu, 'Genso-Eko' is the benefit to be given at the instant of attaining Buddhahood. It is the crystallisation of Buddha's positive and compassionate mind to benefit all suffering beings.

14. If 'Genso-Eko' is limited to the future life, does Shinshu not see the necessity of benefiting others in this life?

Of course this is extremely important. However, such activity is not called 'Genso-Eko' in orthodox Shinshu. Other expressions are used

such as 'Activities to benefit others,' 'Practice in repaying what we owe,' 'Service for Dana (egoless giving),' etc. Such spirit of service is very necessary for those Shinshuists who want to realise Buddha's compassionate ideal and thus spread His teaching among all mankind in the present chaotic world.

## EXAMPLES OF UNORTHODOX FAITH IN SHINSHU

1) The *Nirvana Sutra* teaches that all sentient beings have Buddha nature within themselves. Consequently, Buddhas do not exist outside of us, and **Amida Buddha is our minds themselves and His Pure Land is also in our minds, not anywhere else.**

("Yuishin-no-Mida, Koshin-no-Jodo" or "Amida in Mind only, Pure Land in one's own Mind").

Refer to *A Standard of Shinshu Faith* II-9, 13

2) According to the *Larger Sutra*, Dharmakara (Hozo Bosatsu) made the vow that if all sentient beings awakened to Faith and yet were not born in His country, neither would He attained Buddhahood. Since He did attain Buddhahood and became Amida ten kalpas ago, **all sentient beings have also been saved since then.** His attainment of Buddhahood is indeed the proof of the salvation of all beings. **For this reason, the Awakening of Faith in this life is not necessary at all.**

("Jikko-hiji" or "Secret Teaching of Ten Kalpas).

Refer to *Standard* IV-6; V-8

From this distortion of the 18th Vow, the following misunderstanding may also arise:

Dharmakara promised that He would not attain Buddhahood alone if all beings could not be born by the Awakening of Faith; **yet He himself has become Amida, leaving us in this illusory world - without giving us even a single faith. Is it not unfair?**

3) Zenjishiki (a good personal teacher) is of supreme importance for the Awakening of Faith, Now, I have attained faith through a certain teacher. **He is the only good teacher because he gave me Faith; those who follow other teachers do not have true Faith.**

("Zenjishiki-danomi" or "Faith in a personal teacher").

Refer to *Standard* V-6

4) In Shinshu, **the Vow and the Name should not be mixed up. Which do you believe in, the Vow or the Name?** Those who believe in the Inconceivability of the Name and recite the Nembutsu are considered lacking in true Faith. This is the self power faith, while those who believe in the Inconceivability of the Vow will have true Faith by the Other Power.

("Seimyo-besshu" or "Separation of Vow and Name")

Refer to Chapter 11 of the *Tannisho*; *Standard* IV-8, 9, 10

5) Amida promised to save all beings - even the most wicked person, without any hesitation; such is Amida's absolute Compassion.

Therefore, **it is permissible to say that we may commit any evil that we wish to; Amida will be responsible for all our deeds.**

("Zoaku-muge" or "Committing evils not being wrong"<sup>1</sup>; "Hongwan-bokori" or "Excessive reliance upon the Vow")

Refer to *Standard* IV-6, 11, 12

6) Although Amida promised to save all, without discrimination between wise or ignorant, good and evil, He may still hesitate to receive such ignorant and evil persons like us. Therefore, **we must try to be wise and good so that He will be sure to save us.**

("Senju-kenzen" or "Necessity of Intelligence and Goodness")

Refer to Chapter 13 of *Tannisho*; *Standard* I-3; II-4; IV-12)

7) Amida proclaimed the "Ten utterances of the Nembutsu" in the Eighteenth Vow. Honen also called this Vow "The Vow of Birth by the Nembutsu". On the basis of this, we can say that **the utterance of Amida's Name is the condition for Birth in the Pure Land.**

("Shomyo-shonin" or "The Utterance of His Name being the true cause")

Refer to *Standard* IV-7, V-11; VI-1,2,3,6,9

8) If faith is necessary and doubt is the vital obstacle to Amida's salvation, His Compassion would not be "absolute"; Amida's Compassion could only be called "absolute" when He could save even those who still have doubt and cannot attain Faith. Amida's

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<sup>1</sup> The heresy of licensed evil.

Compassion is, of course, impartial and absolute. Therefore, **Faith is not always necessary; even those who have "doubt" can be born in His Pure Land.**

("Gishin-Ojo" or "Doubt not being an obstacle to birth in the Pure Land")

Refer to *Standard* IV-7; V-7,8

In connection with this, the following question may arise:

Some people have attained Faith and have been saved. However, actually there are a number of people who cannot attain Faith in spite of their struggle; furthermore, there are innumerable people who have no interest in religion at all. **Why are they not saved by Amida's "absolute" Compassion at the same time?**

(Consider the significance of "Shukuzen" or Past Conditionings - good karma from the past). Refer to *Standard* III-11

9) If we receive Amida's Compassion through Faith, the mind of joy arises spontaneously within us. The *Larger Sutra* mentions faith and joy together, and Shinran also states in the *Shoshinge*, "if a single thought of joy is awakened in one's mind, though passions are not severed, one will attain Nirvana". From these passages we know **that the mind of joy is indeed the cause for Birth in the Pure Land**, and again without the flood of joy you cannot say that you have attained Faith in Amida's Compassion.

("Kangi-shoin" or "Joy being the true cause")

Refer to *Standard* V-11

10) Although the Eighteenth Vow proclaims "Three Minds", namely "Sincere Mind", "Serene Faith" and "Wish for Birth", the third mind, **"Wish for Birth" is the essence, and accordingly, is the very cause for Birth in the Pure Land.**

("Yokusho-shoin" or "Wish for Birth being the true cause")

Refer to *Standard* V-2,5

11) **True Faith can be so called only when it is manifested in one's mind, mouth and body.** If not, True Faith has not yet been attained.

("Sango-kimyo" or "Faith through bodily, oral, and mental actions")  
Refer to *Standard* V-2, 5, 8; VI-1, 2, 4.

12) Every one **should know definitely when and where he has attained the Awakening of Faith.** Without knowing the first instant of the Awakening of Faith in time and place, he cannot be considered to have attained True Faith.

("Ichinen-kakuchi" or "Awareness of the first instant of Faith being necessary")

Refer to *Standard* V-1

13) Of the Twofold Profound Conviction (Nishu Jinshin), i.e. the profound insight into the depth of human nature (Shin-ki) and through comprehension of Amida's Compassion (Shin-bo), **the first is the indispensable step to the second conviction, and therefore, is the cause for Birth in the Pure Land; and this first conviction should be attained by self-power.**

("Shinki-shoin" or "Insight into Human's True Nature being the cause"; "Shinki-jiriki" or "Insight into Human's True Nature to be attained by the self-power")

Refer to *Standard* V-13, 14

14) In Shinshu, it is vitally necessary to deepen the fear of our own sins until we really feel that we are destined to hell; **this extremely deepened insight into sinfulness is indeed the state of Faith, and is the cause of Birth in the Pure Land.**

("Jigoku-hiji" or "Secret Teaching of Awareness of Sinfulness"; "Kinageki-anjin" or "Faith of Lamenting one's self")

Refer to *Standard* V-1, 12, 13, 14

15) **The first instant of Faith and the first utterance of the Nembutsu should be the same time.**

("Shinsho-doji" or "Simultaneousness of Faith and Nembutsu")

Refer to *Standard* VI-4

16) **Birth in the Pure Land (and attaining Buddhahood) can be determined only on the death-bed.**

("Rinju-gojo" or "Determination of Birth at death-bed")

Refer to *Standard* V-8; VII-5

17) Shinshu teaches that Buddha's absolute virtues become ours through the Sacred Name, "Namo Amida Butsu" , at the moment of the Awakening of Faith. Because of this teaching, **we can realize Buddhahood in this life by the Other Power.**

("Ichiyaku-bomon" or "Teaching of Attainment of Nirvana in this life")

Refer to *Standard* VII-4