

The Religious Experience of Ippen

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ACCORDING TO IPPEN (1239–1289), Mahāyāna Buddhism teaches that all things are nothing other than our own minds; in the self-power schools which make up the Path of Sages, this is expressed as “All dharmas are the one mind,” and in the Pure Land teaching, “All dharmas are established as *Namu-amida-butsu*.” *Namu-amida-butsu* is the Name of Amida, and at the same time, being the wellspring which underlies our subjectivity, it is the “original nature of mind” or “Buddha-nature.” It is also called “wisdom of non-discrimination,” “great and perfect mirror wisdom,” “wisdom self-received-and-enjoyed.” For Ippen, *Namu-amida-butsu* is a message from a point antecedent to any consciousness of this world and the other world and further back than Bodhisattva Dharmākara’s Vow to attain Buddhahood. It is the source from which this world and the other world, sentient beings and Amida part from each other and emerge forth. In reality, it is from this point that the Primal Vow arises, and here that the Buddha’s perfect enlightenment and the birth in the Pure Land of sentient beings are fulfilled. Ippen states: “The Name is the Dharma of the oneness of subject and object” (7); “In the Name, *Namu-amida-butsu*, there is no doctrinal rationale” (83); “‘No word that names’ is the Name” (45). The Name, then, implies the inner working before any discrimination of subject and object; it is the Name that is no-name, by which the nameless names itself. From it is born the “Moment” in which all things can take form. Hence, the Name is never a static oneness. While *Namu-amida-butsu* is, as Ippen says, “the solitary

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and single Name," in the background there is Amida Buddha, there is the Vow of Bodhisattva Dharmākara. Since there is the Vow, there are also sentient beings and Buddha, this world and the Pure Land, standing in positions of mutual negation and dualistic opposition. As long as they do so, however, it is impossible to avoid contradiction, and if one seeks somehow to evade contradiction, further contradictions arise, stretching out in an endless line. The only way to avoid such contradiction is to break through it. Pure Land Buddhism generally holds that one can go from this world to be born in the Pure Land through the utterance of the Name, but for Ippen, to be born in the Pure Land means to penetrate into the Name itself. In doing so, one strips away self-centered subjectivity at its very roots and attains realization of the "original nature of mind." This is for all dharmas, which are *Namu-amida-butsu*, or "virtues of mind that exist originally from the beginningless past" (72), to attain birth in the Pure Land. Thus, "among all living things—mountains and rivers, grasses and trees, even the sounds of blowing winds and rising waves—there is nothing whatever that is not the *nembutsu*" (letter 5). In *Namu-amida-butsu*, the myriad dharmas transcend self and are born in the Pure Land.

In the following essay, I would like to trace the religious experience of Ippen, relying on his *Record* and on the text of the *Ippen Hijiri-e* (1299), a biographical hand-scroll.

i. *The Nature of Birth-and-Death*

When Ippen's father Nyobutsu died on the 24th of the fifth month, Kōchō 3 (1263), Ippen returned home to Shikoku from twelve years of religious study in Kyushu.

After [his return], at times he entered the gate of truth and endeavored in practice, at times he mingled in the dust of worldly life and turned his thoughts to familial love and affection. Then he would play with children, even spinning a spool-shaped top in the air for them. On one occasion, the top fell to the ground and lay still. Later he would say: "Going over this in my mind, I saw that if you spin a top, it will turn, and if you do not go about spinning it, it won't. Our turning in transmigration is precisely so. With our activities of mind, body and speech, there can be no end to transmigration in the six paths. But how would we

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transmigrate if our self-actions ceased? Here for the first time this struck my heart, and realizing the nature of birth-and-death, I grasped the essence of the Buddha's teaching."

(*Hijiri-e* scroll 1, section 2)

Ippen grasped "the essence of the Buddha's teaching" by coming to know subjectively "the nature of birth-and-death," and through his realization made the decision to renounce secular life anew, resolving to "abandon the ties of indebtedness and love and enter the realm of the non-created." What is the truth of birth-and-death, and how does knowledge of it lead to a grasp of the essence of the Buddhist teaching? The *Record* states: "This body is the form of drifting along in the flow of impermanence; hence from instant to instant it arises and perishes. This mind is an illusive mind; hence it is false and illusory. Do not rely on them" (26). Since the self and all surrounding things are transient existences incessantly transmigrating without beginning or end, they perish moment by moment. The discriminative thinking with which we carry out our daily lives is in fact pervaded by illusion and falsity, having no contact with truth.

That all things, including human beings, transmigrate without beginning and without end means that our existence is unfolding infinitely, and that fundamentally our nature is rooted in nothingness (*mu*). Because of this, our existence is one of impermanence, arising and perishing moment by moment. That arising-and-perishing is "momentary" means that, being rooted in nothingness, it is in fact no-arising-and-perishing, or non-arising and non-perishing. Hence, transmigration in momentary arising-and-perishing is a chain that is actually non-arising and non-perishing; it is, so to speak, a non-continuous continuity. It is not to be objectified and cannot be grasped truly as substantial. Nevertheless, our dichotomous thinking apprehends this momentary transmigration as continuous life, and further, attached to this arising or life, views it as actual existence. When Ippen states that "birth-and-death is illusory thought," he is speaking of life that is thus seen as continuous—objectified as being or actuality—and death that is seen as its final end. Attachment lurks in the discriminative mind that has not fully realized that birth-and-death is in essence momentary and that views it relatively; this is the core of "illusory mind" and "illusory thinking." Illusory, discriminative thinking, since it is accompanied in its depths by consciousness of ego-self,

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not only divides actor and acted upon, subject and object, but further is attached to each of these as existent and actual. Ippen states, " 'Mind-
edness' is the path of birth-and-death; 'no-mind' is the castle of nirvana. . . .
Through the raising of dichotomous thinking, birth-and-death comes
into being" (60). Attachment to birth-and-death arises because of dis-
criminative thinking, and when such thinking and attachment disappear,
the realization of birth-and-death that is no-birth-and-death—or nirvana—
manifests itself. To attain emancipation one must achieve a transforma-
tion of consciousness, abandoning discriminative thinking and realizing
non-discrimination; that is, one must die subjectively to that life which
is birth-and-death and awaken to birth-and-death that is no-birth-and-
death. For Ippen, this transformation is made possible by the Name,
which is Other Power.

Ippen turned to the Name of Other Power as the way of emancipation
from birth-and-death rather than choosing the Path of Sages because he
perceived in the latter the attachment to self that shadows self-power
practice. He states, "As long as one practices in self-power, self-attach-
ment and arrogance arise" (21); "If there is any self-attachment at all,
practice cannot be fulfilled" (13). By contrast, "In the gate of the Pure
Land one 'casts away body and mind,' and with not a single place one
longs for in all the three realms and six paths, aspires for birth in the Pure
Land. There must not be a single thing in this world that you hold
indispensable" (1). The way of the Pure Land is not to free oneself from
birth-and-death while maintaining one's existence, beset by self-attach-
ment; it lies in abandoning this self transmigrating in birth-and-death
and all illusive attachment, leaving behind all things of this world, and
taking refuge in the nembutsu. Hence, for Ippen the nembutsu is in no
sense whatever a practice of self-power; it must be the Other Power of the
Primal Vow, which is the working of the Dharma itself. If there is at bot-
tom the least designing or calculation on the part of the practitioner in his
utterance of the Name, it must be rejected as not being the practice em-
bodying Other Power. The nembutsu of Other Power always transcends
the subjectivity of birth-and-death, or discriminative thinking; when we
have cast away our bodies and minds and put a stop to all willful contriv-
ance, for the first time it manifests itself in the depths of subjectivity as the
Dharma—the power of the Tathāgata's Primal Vow—beginning to work
in us. Or rather, through the Dharma's working in us as the emerging
presence of the power of the Vow, our bodies and minds are made to fall

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away and all calculation is made to cease. In other words, the power of the Primal Vow emerges present in us as the death of subjectivity itself; that is, the Great Death. Ippen states, "Once you have encountered the Name embodying supreme merit in a single utterance, there is nothing for which you must live to the morrow. It is wishing to die immediately that becomes your fundamental desire" (74). In the emergence of this Name embodying supreme merit in a single utterance, Ippen realized the Great Death. The Name, in the single thought-instant of its utterance, immediately frees one from the deluded thinking of attachment to samsaric life and brings one to the realization of birth-and-death that is no-birth-and-death. To realize truly subjectively that birth-and-death is originally "momentary" is nothing less than to extricate oneself from birth-and-death itself, as it is here and now, and to realize no-birth-and-death which immediately underlies it. "The nature of birth-and-death" which Ippen grasped is this truth that "birth-and-death as such is nirvana." This is "the essence of the Buddha's teaching."

There seems to have been an incident which occasioned Ippen's second renunciation of the bonds of family and secular life. But whatever the immediate circumstances, there can be little doubt that at the heart of his determination to "abandon life in the mountains and moors and leave shelter to the winds and rains" lay a realization of death. This death was not simply death in contrast to life, but the death of the subjectivity itself, occurring within the realization of "momentary" birth-and-death. Ippen's nembutsu is one of Great Death taking place here and now at the roots of the subjectivity, and it was in this sense that his renunciation of secular life emerged from his realization of the nature of birth-and-death and of the essence of the Buddha's teaching.

ii. *Abandon!*

Ippen, spurred by the realization of his own inferior nature, with his "mind but illusory thought," and by his awareness of impermanence, abandoned his life in mountains and moors. At that time, the image of Kūya (903-72) as an "abandoning-hijiri" (*sute-hijiri*) was etched in his mind. Ippen, declaring Kūya to be his teacher and model, led a life of wandering in which, like Kūya, he "entrusted his acts and words and thoughts to fate and yielded the four forms of deportment to bodhi" (99). He states: "In the Buddha's teaching, unless you cast away your body

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and life, there can be no realization of benefit. In the Buddha's teaching, there is nothing of worth; casting away your body and life itself is worth" (74). Such casting away of life and possessions was wholly due to Kūya's influence.

Ippen became an abandoning-hijiri in the realization of his inferior nature and explains concerning this:

There are three classes of nembutsu practicers. The practicer of superior nature, while keeping wife and children and living ordinary home life, is free of all attachments and so attains birth. The practicer of middling nature, though he abandons wife and children, still maintains a place to live and provisions for clothing and food, and being without any attachment to these attains birth. The practicer of inferior nature abandons and frees himself from all things to attain birth. We are convinced that, since we are of inferior natures, were we not to abandon all, we would unfailingly cherish attachments to different things at the point of death and it would hinder our birth. Hence we practice in this manner. You should deliberate on this fully in your own minds.

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The practicer of superior nature might be said to indicate a man like Shinran. Shinran himself was grieved by his inability to observe precepts and lamented, "How sorrowful, Gutoku Shinran," but in Ippen's eyes, such a man was a practicer of superior nature. He states:

There are two types of demons, compliant demons and contrary demons. There are those which become demons while obedient to the practicer's heart and those which become demons while opposing and confusing him. Of these two, the compliant demons are the more serious. Wife and children are such. (36)

The compliant demons of wife and children are shunned as more fearful than the contrary demons of sickness and natural mishap. At work here is Ippen's profound self-reflection on his failure to remain in secular life and on his abandonment of both family and home. Shinran took the stance of being "neither monk nor secular," a position which should be understood to be completely different from an indeterminate one of 'half-monk and half-lay.' It is a status of monk far more thoroughgoing than that of the ordinary monk, and at the same time it is thoroughly secular, living in

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the world but standing on the non-secular that runs through the depths of the secular. From the ordinary point of view, it may appear to be a half-hearted and hybrid stance, but in Shinran it was a way of life that could be called at once totally-priestly and totally-worldly. Such life was, for Ippen, one of a practitioner of superior nature and totally beyond emulation.

If Shinran may be said to be a practitioner of superior nature, then one of "middling nature," being a monk, probably indicates a man like Hōnen, who could make provisions for the three necessities of food, clothing and shelter without becoming attached to them. Hōnen stated, "Food, clothing, and shelter are aids to the nembutsu," recognizing their positive significance. For Ippen, however:

Food, clothing, and shelter are the three evil paths. To desire and make a display of clothing is karma for the path of beasts. To seek greedily after food is karma for the path of hungry demons. To set up a shelter is karma for the path of hell. Hence, if you aspire to free yourself from the three evil paths, you must free yourself from food, clothing, and shelter. (75)

Behind the strong denunciations of family and the necessities of life as "demons" or "the three evil paths" lies Ippen's existential experience of himself as the "evil person" of whom Shinran's Shin Buddhism teaches, "The evil person is Amida's true concern in making the Vow." With this as his basis, however, Ippen took the way of the abandoning-hijiri, diverging from the ways of life of Hōnen and Shinran.

"Abandoning" further plays an important role in Ippen's concept of faith or "settled mind" (*anjin*). Ippen was once asked how this attitude could be attained and answered by quoting Kūya's expression, "Abandon!" He went on:

The practitioner of nembutsu abandons both wisdom and folly; he abandons the stances of good and of evil; he abandons the reasonings maintained by noble and humble, high and low; he abandons the fear of hell and abandons the aspiration for the Pure Land, and further abandons the enlightenment of all the schools: thus abandoning all things, he utters the nembutsu. It is this nembutsu that perfectly accords with Amida's all-transcending Primal Vow. (letter 5)

Wisdom and folly, good and evil, noble and humble, hell and the Pure

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Land: all such elements of a dualistic world—all attachments to things—are abandoned and one becomes *Namu-amida-butsu*. This is settled mind. When our minds are caught and moved by something “outside,” there can be only agitation and distraction. Even though that something is Amida Buddha or the Pure Land, if there is the slightest thinking about it in the depths of the consciousness, the mind is unsettled. Even “decisively settled mind” or “*satori*” is a something. As long as that something remains, one is far removed from the attainment of settled mind. This is the meaning of Ippen’s statement, “Thinking of the Buddha and thinking of the sutras can occasionally become the flames of hell” (letter 9). Where all has been abandoned—including the sentient being who takes refuge in Amida and Amida who is taken refuge in—the foundations upon which Buddha and sentient being exist crumble and both vanish. Without abandoning completely in this fashion there can be no settled mind, for until the basis upon which Buddha and sentient being stand is laid bare, an unsettledness remains. Settled mind is attained for the first time where Buddha as Buddha and sentient being as sentient being have disappeared. This is what Ippen means when he says that the *nembutsu* that truly accords with Amida’s all-transcending Primal Vow is said in the abandonment of all things.

In Pure Land Buddhism, “settled mind” signifies the three attitudes taught in the *Meditation Sutra*: true mind, deep mind, and the aspiration for birth in the Pure Land through turning over merit. These Three Minds are our sincere faith, our aspiration, and so have traditionally been considered crucial. Ippen, however, took the position that the Three Minds were taught only to draw people who had not abandoned self-power and self-attachment to the utterance of the Name in Other Power, and that they were unnecessary for the person who had already truly taken refuge. This is the doctrine that “to establish the Three Minds is to abolish them,” expressed in the statement: “Apart from abandoning body and mind and saying the *nembutsu*, there is no other consideration concerning the Three Minds. The stance of abandoning body and mind itself is *Namu-amida-butsu*” (3). For Ippen the Three Minds lie in the *nembutsu* of Other Power, in which all discrimination of the Three Minds as the Three Minds has been cast away and all calculative thinking has been abandoned. The Three Minds are in fact nothing other than the very transcendence of the “Three Minds” that we establish in ourselves and our becoming utterly the *nembutsu*. In Ippen’s *nembutsu* of Other Power

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subject and object, practitioner and Buddha Dharma are one. It is the samādhi of single practice, or nembutsu-samādhi, concerning which Ippen states: "The self is no longer the self. Then, as our heart is Amida Buddha's heart, our bodily actions Amida Buddha's actions, and our words Amida Buddha's words, the life we are living is Amida Buddha's life" (letter 1). A sentient being's utterance of the Name in non-attachment and no-mind is the Tathāgata's pronouncing of the Name; thus "nembutsu-samādhi itself is Amida" (54).

Further, Ippen states: "Nembutsu-samādhi is the Dharma without color, without form, and beyond comprehension. . . . There is no here or there; no coming [to welcome], no going [to be born]. It is the Dharma of no coming and no leaving, surpassing all conceivability and comprehension" (54). Nembutsu-samādhi is a Dharma of *no* color, *no* form, *no* coming and *no* leaving, indicating that in it the basis of all things in no-mind has become manifest: "As water drinks water and fire burns fire, pine tree is pine, bamboo is bamboo: in being itself, each in its own way, there is no birth-and-death" (14). When one has attained nembutsu-samādhi, in which all things disclose their fundamental nature as no-mind, the "settled mind" or "Three Minds" which we raise in ourselves is no longer at issue.

Whether you say it with a settled mind or say it without a settled mind, the nembutsu cannot deviate from the all-transcending Primal Vow that is Other Power. In Amida's Primal Vow there is nothing lacking, nothing superfluous. Outside of this, what is there to say of a proper attitude? Simply return to the heart of a foolish person and recite the nembutsu. (letter 5)

When we return to no-mind, we experience for the first time the mind's being in repose. Settled mind becomes possible only where all has been cast away and one arrives at no-mind or non-thinking, for only thus can all things in existence be perceived truly. Ippen's "Abandon!" means to return to no-mind.

iii. *The Verse on the Non-duality of Ten and One*

In autumn of 1271, at Kubo-dera on his native Shikoku, Ippen

made a clearing in a secluded spot covered with blue moss and verdant ivy. There he built a hermitage with a pine gate and

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brushwood door. On the wall to the east he placed the painting of the two rivers as an image of worship and, cutting off all outside contact, carried on his practice in solitude. Abandoning all affairs, he solely recited the Name. With no impediments to his practice in the four forms of deportment—walking, standing, sitting and lying—he greeted and passed the springs and autumns of three years. At that time, he made a verse of seven-character lines expressing the Dharma as he understood it in his own heart and placed it on the wall adjacent to the sacred image:

*Perfect enlightenment ten kalpas past—of the realm of sentient beings;
Birth in one thought-instant—in Amida's land.*

Where ten and one are non-dual, we realize no-birth-and-death;

Where realm and land are equal, we sit in Amida's great assembly.

(Hijiri-e 1, 4)

According to the *Hijiri-e*, before he composed this verse Ippen made a pilgrimage to Zenkō-ji in Shinano province. There he made a copy of a painting depicting Shan-tao's parable of the two rivers and the White Path, which expresses Shan-tao's own realization of the Dharma. Ippen later used this painting as an image of worship at Kubo-dera. This encounter is reminiscent of the one between the two great Pure Land patriarchs, Shan-tao and Hōnen. Hōnen venerated Shan-tao as an incarnation of Amida, stating "If I had not encountered Shan-tao, it would have been impossible for me to attain the settled faith." Ippen took the position of "relying on the Dharma and not other people," and at a time when a number of contradictory doctrines were current in the various branches of Pure Land Buddhism, went directly to Shan-tao's understanding, transcending the bounds of time and place. In this way he seems to have attained an immovable confirmation of his own understanding of the Name as subjectivity. Ippen himself spoke of his verse as the Dharma as he himself understood it, and "after the completion of this vowed period of special nembutsu practice, he renounced the world forever, immediately casting off all involvements; devoting his life to the Dharma-realm, he resolved to benefit sentient beings" (*Hijiri-e*).

The "perfect enlightenment ten kalpas past" in the verse refers to the fact that ten kalpas have passed since the time when Bodhisattva Dharmākara made his vows and fulfilled them through practices, thus becoming Amida Buddha and establishing his Pure Land in the West.

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Among these vows is the eighteenth, stating that if sentient beings say the nembutsu they will be able to attain birth in the Pure Land, and if they cannot attain birth, then Dharmākara himself will not become a Buddha. The fulfillment of this Vow ten kalpas ago means that at that time it was already determined that by uttering "Namu-amida-butsu" sentient beings would be able to attain birth. Here, ten kalpas does not indicate the passage of so many units of time; rather, it represents mythically the fact that the Buddha's perfect enlightenment transcends our everyday mode of thinking. Ordinarily we transform Amida into something apart from our ego-centered selves, giving him substance and turning him into an object, and we seek this Amida outside of ourselves, putting a space of ten kalpas between ourselves and Buddha. The Dharma, however, is originally free of all delimiting aspects and forms; it manifested form out of suchness, which has neither color nor form, and this form is Amida as the Buddha of fulfilled body and as the power of his Primal Vow. Ippen states, "The three syllables, *A-mi-da*, denote 'Immeasurable Life.' This is life without measure and timelessly abiding, neither arising nor perishing. It is itself none other than the life of all sentient beings. For this reason Amida is called 'the body of the dharma-realm' " (45). This means that Amida, who attained Buddhahood through the fulfillment of the Vow, is originally none other than Amida, the dharmakāya itself. Amida Buddha is from the very beginning timelessly abiding beyond birth-and-death. Moreover, this infinite and timeless nature is originally provided in us as our own fundamental nature. At our very roots, we are grounded in the immeasurable and ever-abiding life of Amida, and we manifest ourselves from Amida's place of non-arising and non-perishing. Although Amida is transcendent from the perspective of our everyday selves, when one stands in the transcendence where the ego-self has been cast off, one realizes that Amida is originally inseparable from oneself. The site of this self-realization is *Namu-amida-butsu*, where practitioner and Dharma are one. When Amida attained Buddhahood ten kalpas past, *Namu-amida-butsu* was established as the act resulting in birth in the Pure Land for sentient beings; this means that the finite human being has originally come into existence from the transcendence of Amida's perfect enlightenment. Thus, *Namu-amida-butsu* is itself the self-realization that the present point in time in which our existence stands is, in its depths, unfolding infinitely, and that Amida's perfect enlightenment and the birth of sentient beings are here fulfilled. Further, this infinite unfolding at the ground of our sub-

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jectivity is *Namu-amida-butsu*. This is the meaning of the *nembutsu*'s being called "the king of *samādhis*," or the *nembutsu* of plain wood (*Shōkū*), or the single path without impediment (*Shinran*). For *Ippen*, *Shan-tao*'s White Path is also *Namu-amida-butsu*, for it opens up at the bottom of the samsaric subjectivity that is the two rivers, and there, the distance between this world and the other world, sentient being and Buddha vanishes, and all things are empty (*ku*). *Namu-amida-butsu* is not a matter of the self believing and taking refuge (*namu*) in a transcendent existence, Amida Buddha (*amida-butsu*). Nor does it consist in indicating the connection between Buddha and self from a relative standpoint. *Namu-amida-butsu* is not formed of a relationship between Buddha and self, but, conversely, it is out of the solitary and single *Namu-amida-butsu* that the relationship of "*namu*, that is, *amida-butsu*" arises. Amida Buddha is not on the opposite shore from the self, but rather is to be realized on this shore, where one returns to the absolute "this shore" transcending the relativity of this world and the other world. The transformation of illusion into *satori*, of birth-and-death into the birth-and-death beyond birth-and-death emerges present at the roots of our subjectivity in the one thought-instant of *Namu-amida-butsu* here and now. The one thought-instant of "Birth in one thought-instant, in Amida's Land" is the one thought-instant of *Namu-amida-butsu* that brings about this transformation of subjectivity. This is not to seek Buddha outside of the self, but rather within, and in this way to break through the ego-self. *Namu-amida-butsu*, which directly manifests itself in the casting off of ego-self and which is thus without any duality of practitioner and Dharma, is itself birth. "Birth in one thought-instant in Amida's land" can be said to be the self-realization where all relativities are completely broken through at the root of the self here and now.

Illusion is a single thought-instant; enlightenment also is a single thought-instant. Just as wandering out from the capital of Dharma-nature is a single thought-instant of illusion, so overturning illusion is again a single thought-instant. (73)

Birth is the first thought-instant [of taking refuge]. The term "first thought-instant," however, is still used with regard to the practitioner; from the very beginning, *Namu-amida-butsu* itself is birth. This birth is no-birth. The point of encountering this Dharma [of *Namu-amida-butsu*] is provisionally called one

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thought-instant. . . . Buddhism speaks of nothing other than the single thought-instant here and now. The three times are, as such, this one thought-instant. (52)

It is possible to say that *Namu-amida-butsu* in itself is birth and that there is no birth apart from it because the single thought-instant of *Namu-amida-butsu* in the immediate present is the realization in which one completely breaks through the self. *Namu-amida-butsu* is an absolute one thought-instant that here and now severs the steady progress of time from past to present and into the future and directly touches the perfect enlightenment of ten kalpas past. Here there is no practitioner or Dharma; apart from the Name, there is no birth. As Ippen states in phrases such as "Only *Namu-amida-butsu* is born" and "From the very beginning the Name is birth," that one thought-instant is nothing other than birth itself. Shan-tao's statements, "The moment before is the end of life, the moment after is birth," and "In one voicing of the Name all karmic evil is eliminated," also indicate that the utterance of the Name is birth occurring in the immediate present.

For Ippen, the oneness of practitioner and Dharma is the stance within the subjective realization called *Namu-amida-butsu*, in which all relative discriminations are severed.

The Name is not blue, or yellow, or red, or white; neither long nor short, neither square nor round. It is not being; it is not nothingness. Since it is also free of the five flavors, even though one utters it with the mouth one does not discover it to have any particular flavor of the Dharma. It is not a dharma that one can grasp or measure as anything whatsoever. . . . It is a dharma which cuts off all words and explanation, teaching that when a person simply recites [the *nembutsu*] at random as his voice will have it, he becomes free of endless birth-and-death. (20)

According to Ippen, the Name is free of all qualifications and is in essence emptiness or non-self. Its fundamental nature is the wordlessness that severs all words. It is the Name of no-thinking and no-voicing of which Fa-chao states, "Thinking as such is no-thinking; voicing as such is no-voicing" (45). In the subjective realization of this Name, ten kalpas ceases to be ten kalpas, one thought-instant ceases to be one thought-instant. Hence, "outside of *Namu-amida-butsu* in the immediate present

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there should be no deliberating of before and after." By simply casting away body and mind in the utterance of *Namu-amida-butsu* one realizes the Dharma beyond birth-and-death. Thus Ippen states:

Outside of the Name there is no practitioner or Dharma; outside of the Name there is no birth. The myriad things of the universe are all virtues that exist within the body of the Name. This means, then, that the one thought-instant at the ceasing of breath in *Namu-amida-butsu*, in which we recognize that that is attainment of receptivity to the unborn nature of all existences, is right-mindedness at the moment of death. This is none other than the one thought-instant of the perfect enlightenment of ten kalpas ago. *Namu-amida-butsu*. (letter 4)

Here, ten kalpas and one thought-instant, Amida's land and the realm of sentient beings are non-dual and equal. This is not to say, however, that Amida's land and the world of sentient beings are identical. Rather, where the relativity of Amida's land and the world of sentient beings is fully transcended—completely negated at the roots of subjectivity—the two stand non-dual and equal. When one realizes that Amida's land and the world of sentient beings are non-dual, Amida's land is thoroughly Amida's land and the world of sentient beings is thoroughly the world of sentient beings. Moreover, Amida's land and the world of sentient beings are mutually reflecting, related by a circular mutuality in which the world of beings reflects Amida's land and Amida's land reflects the world of beings.

In Pure Land Buddhism, turning over merit (*ekō*) is re-turning, it is circulating. Turning over merit for birth in the Pure Land is not a movement only away from this world, it is not only from the other. It is a mutual going and returning out from this world and out from the other. Where there is a going out, there is necessarily a returning, and vice versa. The working of the Primal Vow emerges from Amida and reaches sentient beings, and then it returns again to Amida. When it is returning to Amida, it is not called the Primal Vow, but rather true mind, deep mind, and aspiration to be born through *ekō*. Moreover, when the Three Minds go out from sentient beings and arrive in Amida, they become the Primal Vow and return again to sentient beings. This turning over merit which goes outward and returns becomes, in *Namu-amida-butsu*, a relationship of "going is returning," of the faith of sentient beings being the realization

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of the Buddha, and, at the same time, of "returning is going," of the Buddha's realization being the faith of sentient beings. In *Namu-amida-butsu*, going and returning, faith and realization are one. In the *Larger Sutra of Immeasurable Life*, Ānanda bows reverently towards Amida Buddha and says to Śākyamuni, "World honored one, my wish is that I might behold Amida's land of peace, together with the great assembly of all the bodhisattvas and direct disciples." No sooner has this been said than Amida releases a great radiance, illuminating the worlds of all the Buddhas in every direction, and because of this, the people gathered to hear Śākyamuni in the present world all behold Amida, and the members of the saintly host in the Pure Land see those sitting in Śākyamuni's assembly. At the very instant that Ānanda pays homage to Amida, the distinction between this world and the other world which arises in the discriminative thinking of this world disappears, and the realm transmitted only from Buddha to Buddha opens up within Ānanda. The realm transmitted only from Buddha to Buddha can be said to reveal the relationship of mutual circularity of out-going and returning *ekō*. When Ippen states that "the Name itself is the true and real seeing of Buddha," he is pointing to the mutual circularity of going and returning which lies at the core of *nembutsu-samādhi*. Thus:

The *nembutsu-samādhi* we are concerned with is the Buddha-essence which has originally existed from the beginningless past, ever abiding and unperishing; hence, the Name itself is the true and real seeing of Buddha, the true and real *samādhi*. For this reason the *nembutsu* is called the king of *samādhis*. (34)

Do not seek the vision of Buddha apart from the utterance of the Name. The Name itself is the true and real seeing of Buddha. Buddha seen with the physical eye is not true Buddha. If we see Buddha with the eyes we now possess, we should realize that it is a demon. (35)

iv. *The Verse of Six-Hundred Thousand People*

In 1274, Ippen received a revelation through the deity of the Kumano Shrine, a manifestation of Amida, which he treasured as the direct, oral transmission of the Dharma. He condensed his experience into the following two verses:

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Verse of Six-Hundred Thousand People

The six-character Name is the Dharma that is One/all (*ippen*);
The ten worlds—beings and lands—make up the body of One/all;
The myriad practices freed of thinking realize One/all:
[Such a practitioner of the Name is] the most exalted of men, a
wondrously excellent flower.

No-birth in the Six Characters

In the six characters [of Na-mu-a-mi-da-butsu]
There is originally no birth-and-death;
In the space of one voicing:
Immediate realization of no-birth.

Ippen—"one/all" or "one-totality"—is a Buddhist name, and at the same time it signifies the six-character Name, the one thought-instant here and now. A commentary on the *Record* by the priest Shunpō states: "The solitary and single Name pervades the Dharma-realm; hence, as a term for the sacred Name, he called himself Ippen." The one thought-instant here and now is the thought-instant that occurs as the realization of "momentary" arising and perishing. It is the realization at the point where Amida Buddha, non-arising and non-perishing in the one thought-instant, becomes present at the roots of our subjectivity. Further, it is the realization in which, in instant after instant of uttering the Name, we transcend our calculative thinking and the perfect enlightenment ten kalpas past reaches fulfillment. With each voicing we part from birth-and-death and sit in Amida's great assembly.

For Ippen, the nembutsu is nembutsu of no-self. It is the Great Death; hence "saying the nembutsu in the disappearance of self is none other than to die" (68). It is not the practitioner's nembutsu; as Ippen states, "In the saying of the Name thought-instant after thought-instant, the nembutsu says the nembutsu." Though it is not the practitioner but the nembutsu that says the Name, this does not necessarily mean that Ippen adopts the perspective of original enlightenment (*hongaku*) and ignores the being who attains enlightenment at some point in time. Rather, this phrase signifies the breaking through of the duality of attained and original enlightenment at the roots of the subjectivity and the saying of the Name where the person of acquired enlightenment is not the person of acquired enlightenment, where the Dharma of original enlightenment is not the Dharma of

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original enlightenment. "The nembutsu says the nembutsu" means that the nembutsu saying itself becomes present in us; in fact, it is simply the true meaning of the words, "I say the nembutsu." Here there is no object or purpose: "Only Namu-amida-butsu is born." Ippen rejects any position which presupposes a duality of practice and realization; in such a view, one anticipates birth beyond the nembutsu, and the nembutsu is a means to that end, or a cause leading to that result. Rather, Ippen takes the position of the oneness of practice and attainment, founded on the awareness of the Pure Land that is immediately present in the nembutsu; this is the position that the one thought-instant here and now is itself birth. It is to seek Amida within, not outside of the self, and it asserts that the mind of no subject or object which emerges present at the very point of casting away body and mind is Amida himself, "the Tathāgata who is mind-king."

When, casting away the body in this defiled world, one brings the heart to dwell in the city of purity, and earnestly entrusting to the Primal Vow, singleheartedly utters the Name, then naturally the Tathāgata who is mind-king ascends to the dais of perfect enlightenment, and the saintly host of one's own self-existence leaps and dances and sports through the Dharma-realm. (*Hijiri-e*)

In the nembutsu, in which one returns to the mind of no subject or object, practice loses its character as a means to realization, realization rids itself of its character as the end of practice, and both return as one to the wellspring of subjectivity. Here, practice and realization are one and the same. Further, the practice of the nembutsu of no-self returns to the "Tathāgata who is mind-king," which is the wellspring beneath the duality of practice and realization. This practice can also be called, in Dōgen's words, "practice in attainment," standing upon the realization that Tathāgata is our own mind-king. Practice that is separate from and in search of realization is inevitably shadowed by self-attachment, which was what Ippen abhorred most. Practice which casts off self-attachment and lets body and mind fall away is, in itself, the manifestation of realization. Thus the utterance of the Name is, as such, birth. Here there is no point of death or ordinary, ongoing life. In the utterance of the Name is Amida's coming. Hence Ippen states: "Outside of the nembutsu here and now there is no nembutsu at the point of death. The point of death is none other than ordinary life." "The state of saying the Name is itself the true coming of Amida for the practitioner" (55).

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For Ippen, the utterance of the Name is not only birth and Amida's coming; it is faith also: "Outside of the reciting of the Name there are no Three Minds whatever" (2). That is, no-mind, which utters the Name beyond subject and object, is itself faith, turned over from the Name in such a way that there is no turning over. With the utterance of the Name as their common foundation, faith, practice and realization are made one. For Ippen, they are originally one and are nothing other than the emerging presence of "the solitary and single Name."

This oneness is also expressed in his interpretation of the six characters of the Name. In contrast to Hōnen and Shinran, who divided the Name into *namu* and *amida-butsu*, Ippen divides it into three elements:

Na-mu signifies the sentient beings throughout the ten quarters; *A-mi-da* is the Dharma; *Butsu* is the person who has attained enlightenment. The six characters are provisionally unfolded into the three—being, Dharma, and enlightenment—and ultimately these three become one. Thus, apart from the Name there is no sentient being taking refuge, no Dharma taken refuge in, and no person of enlightenment. In other words, it is the point where [the dichotomies of] "self-power" and "Other Power," "being" and "Dharma" are done away with that is *Namu-amida-butsu*.

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For Ippen, the six-character Name holds not only sentient being and Dharma, but enlightenment also; that is, faith, practice, and realization. The Name of the oneness of practitioner and Dharma permeates the sentient being's practice and reaches the perfect enlightenment of the Buddha. Here again, we find the position of the oneness in the *nembutsu* as birth itself.

Thus, in the one thought-instant of *Namu-amida-butsu*, the practitioner dies to samsaric life, realizes birth-and-death that is no-birth-and-death, and undergoes a fundamental transformation of subjectivity. This transformation is not a grasping of the Name by our minds; rather, our hearts and minds are totally grasped by the Name. Were we to comprehend the Name with our ordinary thinking, the Name, which is beyond birth-and-death, would be drawn into the mind and turned into an object of illusory discrimination. Thus Ippen states: "Though you are taken and held by the Name, do not seek to take hold of it." (79). By putting our hearts and minds into the Name, we realize for the first time the "great

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and perfect mirror wisdom," the wisdom of the Name, as our "original face." Then, through the power of "the wisdom-fire of the Name," the firewood of our blind passions is completely consumed and the originally provided Buddha-nature emerges in us.

The myriad dharmas are the one mind, but they cannot by themselves give expression to that fundamental nature—just as the eye cannot see itself, and wood, though fire lies inherent in it, cannot burn with that indwelling fire. But bring forth a mirror, and the eye will see itself. This is none other than the power of the mirror. This "mirror" signifies the one called "great and perfect mirror wisdom," which sentient beings possess originally. It is the Name which all Buddhas have themselves realized. In the mirror of the Name, then, we can see our original face. Hence the *Meditation Sutra* states, "It is like taking up a gleaming mirror and looking into one's own face." Or, if one sets the wood alight with fire from without, it will take flame immediately. This fire and the fire inherent in the wood are not different in essence. Thus we see that the myriad things of the universe are not self-replete; they are brought to fulfillment through a concordance of causes and conditions. Although the fire of Buddha-nature lies within each of us, by it alone the brushwood of our blind passion will not be consumed; it can be consumed only through the power of the wisdom-fire of the Name. (79)

This "great and perfect mirror wisdom" is the undefiled wisdom originally present in sentient beings, but ordinarily it is covered over by clouds of blind passion and does not manifest itself. What we ordinarily think of as our subjectivity is not this wisdom, but *ālaya*-consciousness. *Ālaya*-consciousness, the root of our transmigration, accumulates and bears seeds of endless birth-and-death. In a single utterance of the Name, the husk of *ālaya*-consciousness is torn through, and the heavy burden of birth-and-death since the beginningless past is immediately transformed into "great and perfect mirror wisdom," which is our original subjectivity. This transformation is called "the attainment of wisdom by conversion of consciousness." The great and perfect mirror wisdom is the non-dual wisdom of *prajñā*; it is non-discriminative wisdom, which manifests all things in true suchness. Hence, it is also "the wisdom of equality" in which self and other, this world and the Pure Land are seen

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as equal and without distinction; it is "wisdom of perfect discernment," which perceives all things without hindrance; and it is "wisdom which fulfills acts," bringing all acts of benefiting sentient beings to completion. That such wisdom should shine forth from those sentient beings who utter the Name is a matter for astonishment; this is why Ippen states: "Utterance of the Name in Other Power is single practice surpassing conceivability" (letter 2).

Pure Land Buddhism sometimes tends towards a kind of naïve realism, teaching Amida and the Pure Land as apart from us, objective and transcendental. In other words, it takes the position of "manifesting forms in order to guide." Viewed from the standpoint of great and perfect mirror wisdom, however, this position turns out to be nothing more than a provisional teaching accommodated to the illusions of sentient beings. Thus, when Amida and the Pure Land are explained as "existing entities" apart from the self, even if affirmed only as projections of inner realization, they can be no more than the Dharma in contrast to the being. Where great and perfect mirror wisdom is our own original face, Amida and the Pure Land are not Dharma in contrast to practitioner, but, as Dharma in conformity with practitioner, they indicate a mode of being that is immanence-as-transcendence. This does not mean upward transcendence, but downward transcendence that pierces through the basis of the existence of the self and fixes upon its very foundation. Hence, when Amida and the Pure Land are explained subjectively to be in conformity with our minds, Amida, while within the mind, is our original face, our True Self as the self which has broken through the self. Ippen states:

Concerning the statement, "West from here, past a myriad billion Buddha lands [there is a world called the Land of Bliss]": actually, it is not at a distance of a myriad billion Buddha lands. These words are concerned with the barrier of the deluded attachment of sentient beings. Shan-tao's Commentary states: "Separated by a papery husk of bamboo, they take it as a distance of a thousand *li*." "Past a myriad billion" is stated simply with reference to illusory attachment. In reality, it is not a matter of covering a certain distance. Hence the [*Meditation*] *Sutra* teaches: "Amida Buddha is not far from here." This means that Amida is not at a remove from the hearts and minds of sentient beings. According to the Buddha's teaching of the great vehicle, there

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exists no dharma apart from the mind; in the Path of Sages, it is taught that all dharmas are the one mind, and in Pure Land Buddhism, all dharmas are established as *Namu-amida-butsu*. The myriad dharmas are virtues of mind which exist originally from the beginningless past. However, covered over by illusory dharmas of self-attachment, their essence cannot manifest itself. Now, at the moment these virtues of mind of all sentient beings are established as *Namu-amida-butsu* through the power of the Vow, the unfolding of the mind-virtues of sentient beings takes place. Thus the Name itself is the original nature of mind. This is expressed by the words, "Not far from here," and also, "Do not think that the West is distant; simply have the mind to recite the *nembutsu* ten times." (72)

When all relativities have been cast off here and now in the depths of the self, *Namu-amida-butsu* beyond the dualities of subject and object or sentient being and Buddha directly manifests itself. This *Namu-amida-butsu* is the original nature of mind; it is, in Ippen's words, "the original source of the one mind," of which he states, "The original source of the one mind alone is of itself non-thinking" (letter 9).

To return to the original nature of mind or the original source of the one mind is like fire burning fire in "fire-meditation *samādhi*"; the pine tree becomes *Namu-amida-butsu*, bamboo becomes *Namu-amida-butsu*, all things become *Namu-amida-butsu*. *Namu-amida-butsu* becomes everything in the Dharma-realm. Ippen states: "Outside of the Name there is no practitioner or Dharma; outside of the Name there is no birth. The myriad things of the universe are all virtues within the body of the Name" (letter 4). Here there is nothing to stand in opposition to *Namu-amida-butsu*. In the immediately present Name, "the realms of good and of evil all become the Pure Land" and "All sentient beings, regardless of where they may be in the ten realms, including even those of this *sahā* world, are among the true beings of the Land of Bliss" (94).

The title "Six-Hundred Thousand People" was arrived at by putting together the first character of each line (six-ten-ten thousand-people), but it indicates essentially all sentient beings. All beings include the world of human values of course—for example, the ten realms graded from hell to the Buddha-realm—and more broadly, the entire world of natural existence. Thus all things in existence are here and now the body of the

Namu-amida-butsu of One/all: "Besides simply these six characters—namu-a-mi-da-butsu—we have no body or mind; widely pervading all sentient beings, the Name is the one-totality" (letter 6). Thus, Namu-amida-butsu fills the entire Dharma-realm, and "there should be no deliberating of before or after beyond the Namu-amida-butsu here and now" (93). The nembutsu is not yours or mine, but transcending my nembutsu and your nembutsu, and transcending one and all, it returns to "the original source of the one mind." Where we have transcended the ground of our individual subjectivities, breaking through the self, there is no category of self or other, one or all, and perfect interpenetration without hindrance manifests itself; hence self is other, other is self, one person is all people, all people are one person; one practice is all practice, all practice is one practice. The *Hijiri-e* states: "The saying of the Name that is One/all pervades the Dharma-realm, and without before, without after, all beings with consciousness and spirit become agents of Peace and Bliss, sages of that without bounds."

The "Verse of Six-hundred Thousand People" can be found summarized in the phrase, "The six-character Name of the Primal Vow realizes no-birth in one voicing" (*Hijiri-e*); this is also the substance of "No-birth in the Six Characters." Ippen's subjective nembutsu, in which he "realized no-birth in one voicing," is fully expressed as saying the nembutsu "wholeheartedly, without clinging to one's own wisdom" (82). Shan-tao's praise of the person of nembutsu as "the most excellent of people" was also made with regard to the one fact of "wholeheartedly saying the Name," for the wholehearted utterance—the nembutsu of no-mind—is itself "Amida's heart," "Amida's acts."

In order to transmit the significance of the "Verse of Six-hundred Thousand People" to others, Ippen toured the country distributing strips of paper inscribed with "Namu-amida-butsu: Decisively settled birth, six hundred thousand people." This distribution of nembutsu cards was a practice by which a single person could bring large numbers of people into contact with the nembutsu, and a commentary on the text of a biographical picture scroll, the *Ippen Shōnin eshiden jikidan shō*, states: "Giving the Name of supreme virtues brings to others the ultimate great good. Even through hearing with the ears and reciting with the lips, boundless pure virtue fills the heart and mind; how much greater the virtue in receiving it directly into the heart and viscera and taking it into the very bone. Is there not great merit in this?" Through the cards, it was

possible to bring people to accept the Name with the heart and viscera. There were probably some who, having come into contact with the Dharma through the distribution of cards, immediately uttered the Name and attained emancipation, but there were also those who could not. Nevertheless, even if they did not cast off the self immediately, at some time this cause must take effect. In this sense, the creating of bonds with the Dharma through the distribution of cards can be said to have been the sowing of nembutsu-seeds in all sentient beings.

v. *The Arising of Thought is Realization*

For Ippen, the nembutsu is wholly the practice—or living—of Other Power, as the working of the Dharma itself, and in no way whatever colored by self-power. The practice embodying Other Power is always something that transcends our samsaric subjectivity, but Ippen did not seek that transcendence outside of the self. Turning inward, he sought it in the bottommost depths of the heart, where the self is cast off and the ground of self is broken through. In this way, he realized the original nature of mind, the original source of the one mind, as the wellspring which transcends individual subjectivity downward through its ground. This character of Ippen's Pure Land teaching arises in part from the historical fact that for twelve years he studied Shōkū's Seizan doctrine, which tends towards a Path of Sages outlook, but far more important was Ippen's own persistent, personal aspiration to seek after the meaning of the Buddha Dharma in its broad sense, without distinguishing between Path of Sages and Pure Land. Hence, in his own words, Ippen's Other Power teaching "depends on the Dharma and not other people." A priest named Karahashi had a dream in which it was revealed that Ippen was the incarnation of Bodhisattva Mahāsthāmaprāpta. When he took a record of it to the master, he was chided, "It is the nembutsu that is ultimate. If I am not Mahāsthāmaprāpta, will you refuse to believe?" (104). Ippen's Other Power does not stand on the distinction of self-power and other-power, but rather "depends on the Dharma," on *Namu-amida-butsu* in which practitioner and Dharma are one. Thus, though he speaks of the nembutsu of Other Power, that Other Power transcends self and other, practitioner and Dharma. According to Ippen, self-power and other-power are but the first stage; true Other Power is to abandon the stance of self and other and become the solitary and single nembutsu. There is

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a strikingly close resemblance between Ippen's nembutsu and the breaking through of self or the falling away of body and mind found in Zen; this is possible because his nembutsu is grounded in the negation of the dualism of Path of Sages and Pure Land, self-power and other-power.

Through this nembutsu of non-duality, Ippen was able to obtain recognition of Zen transmission. About the time of his pilgrimage to Kumano, he had a Zen interview with Kakushin, an important Kamakura period Zen master, at Hōman-ji in Settsu. Kakushin was the founder of the Kayadō hijiri on Mt. Kōya and his prestige at Kumano also is said to have been considerable. Before going to Kumano, Ippen climbed Mt. Kōya, where the influence of Pure Land teachings was quite strong, and made a round of the central places of the Kōya hijiri. It is possible that he began to have associations with Kakushin through the Kayadō hijiri at this time and was advised to make a pilgrimage to Kumano. Kakushin posed, as a question, the words, "The arising of thought (*nen*) is realization." Ippen answered on the spot with the poem:

When I utter the Name
There is neither Buddha nor I;
There is only the voicing
Of Namu-amida-butsu.

Kakushin pronounced this "not yet thoroughgoing," not yet penetrating to satori. Where there is voicing, discriminative thinking still remains, and one has not yet become Namu-amida-butsu. Ippen immediately made another poem:

When I utter the Name
There is neither Buddha nor I;
Namu-amida-butsu,
Namu-amida-butsu.

When he heard this, Kakushin bestowed Zen certification on Ippen.

CONCLUSION

Above, I have dealt fragmentarily with the path Ippen took, and have followed the traces of his religious experience. For Ippen, Namu-amida-butsu is the starting point of all things, and at the same time the point of arrival; further, it is all things themselves, and there can be nothing apart

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from it. Through taking refuge in this Name, Ippen returned to the original nature of the self. He attained realization of the self that is not the self, the self attained through all the dharmas, which are *Namu-amida-butsu*. The Name is from the very beginning our original home and original nature, and its "wisdom self-received-and-enjoyed" is the mode of being of our original subjectivity. Here, the discriminative thinking that gives rise to an objectified view of birth-and-death and to attachment to it as being is no more than illusive attachment, transmigrating without any place of refuge. Hence, birth is not to go to the other land, but rather to return to one's own original home.

The Name, which is Other Power that surpasses all conception, is wisdom self-received-and-enjoyed. . . . "Self-received-and-enjoyed" means that, as water drinks water and fire burns fire, pine tree is pine, bamboo is bamboo: in being itself, each in its own way, there is no birth-and-death. (14)

"Self-received-and-enjoyed" indicates the spontaneous working of the body of the Dharma-realm which dwells in the *samādhi* of tranquility; it is the manifestation of Dharma-nature as naturalness, residing in the *samādhi* of emptiness. All things, in their original aspect naturally free of birth-and-death, are also the world of self-becoming, described as "things all attain themselves." This is no-self and no-mind. It is freedom without hindrance, the realm of "the *samādhi* of sporting" that is transmitted only from Buddha to Buddha. When Ippen states, "Concerning the flowers ask the flowers, about purple clouds ask purple clouds: I do not know" (*Hijin-e*), he is expressing without regret his world of the *samādhi* self-received-and-enjoyed. Ippen's *nembutsu* is one of which it could truly be said, "Of matters of the *nembutsu* ask the *nembutsu*: Ippen doesn't know."

In 1289 Ippen's life of fifty years came to a close, but before he died he burned all of his writings, saying, "Every one of the sacred teachings of Śākyamuni's lifetime has become *Namu-amida-butsu*." His crystallization and purification of the Name as "the solitary and single Name" came about through a transcendent experience of non-duality. It was not, however, achieved through any attainment; rather, it was through abandoning.

TRANSLATED BY DENNIS HIROTA