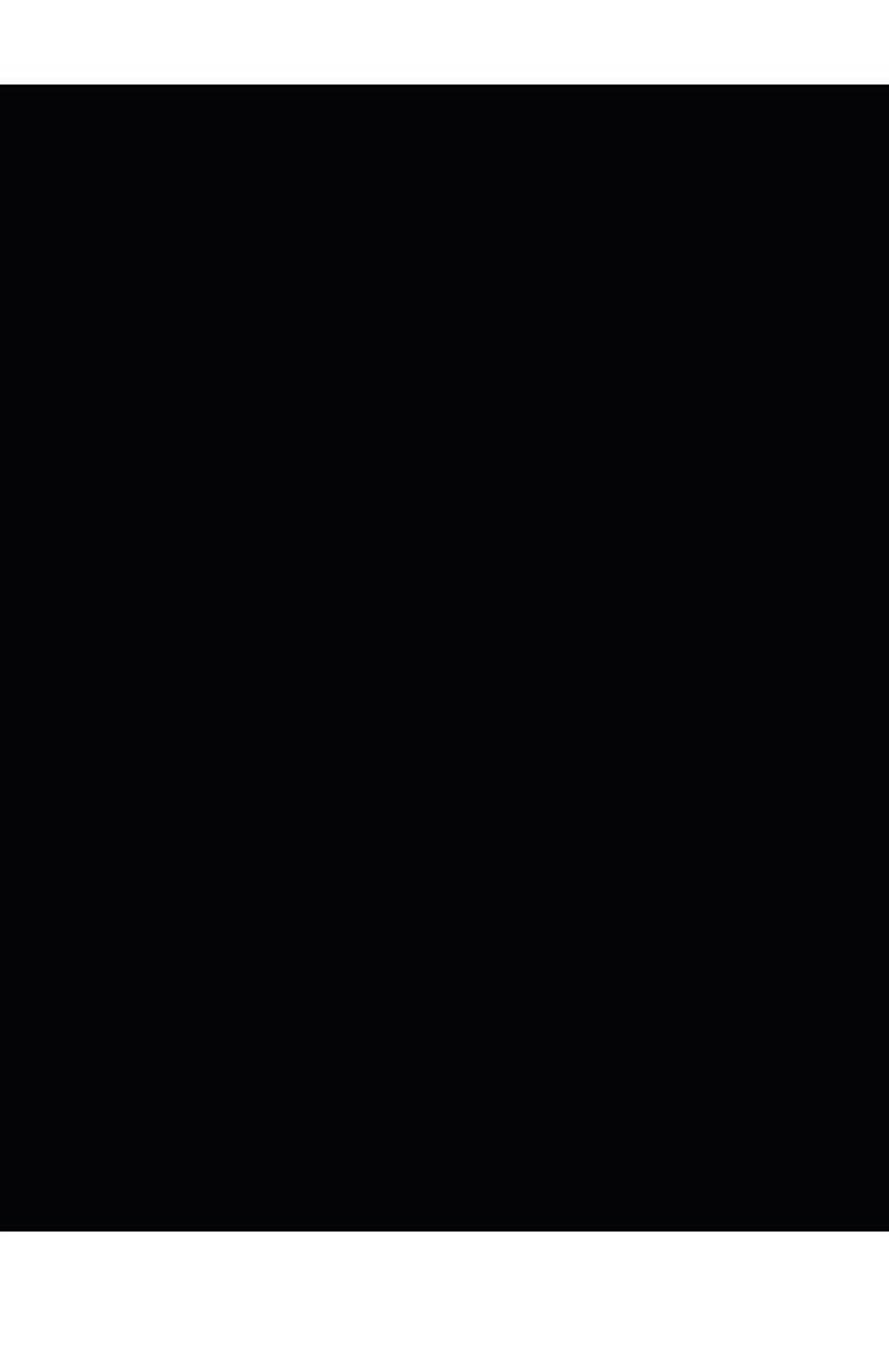


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IPPEN PICTURE SCROLL

Scene from the opening scroll of the Ippen Hijiri-e (a biographical handscroll, 1299) depicting Ippen, in his thirty-third year, at the outset of a pilgrimage that was to evolve into a life of wandering without any settled dwelling, ending only eighteen years later with death.

Ippen (1239-89) first entered the priesthood at the age of ten on the death of his mother. For twelve years, beginning in 1251, he studied Pure Land Buddhism under the direction of the Seizan master Shōtatsu in Kyushu. When his father died in 1263, however, he returned home to the island of Shikoku, probably to shoulder responsibilities as head of his influential family, and he is thought to have married at this time. But his return to secular life was abortive, for serious family problems forced him into a spiritual crisis, and after about seven years he resolved to embark on a religious quest, going first to have one further meeting with Shōtatsu, apparently to take his parting with his former doctrinal study and to seek guidance in a life of practice.

We see Ippen here on a windswept shore of Shikoku perhaps, mountains of Kyushu standing across an expanse of sea. He is accompanied by a small party which includes Shōkai, the author of the text to the scroll, but leads with the determined step that would take him on to ancient centers of religious pilgrimage and to isolated practice, and then throughout the country in propagation of the nembutsu.

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