

TRANSLATIONS

The Record of Ippen: Letters

TRANSLATED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

DENNIS HIROTA

Introduction

ONLY TEN OF Ippen's letters survive, but as concise statements of his nembutsu teaching, they form probably the best introduction to his *Record* as a whole.¹ As for the man himself, although he instructed that "the absence of any monument be [his] monument," ten years after his death a biography in word and picture was made that has come down as one of the finest of Japanese picture scrolls, remarkable for its beauty as well as its apparent accuracy in depicting the details of Ippen's life and the landscape and fixtures of his times. The *Ippen Hijiri-e* — 遍聖絵, with a text by Ippen's brother² and disciple, Shōkai 聖戒, is the major source for information about Ippen, and I will quote here from several early sections which present the immediate background of the formation of his teaching.

Ippen (1239–89) was born to an influential family in Iyo province on Shikoku, but when he was ten his mother died and his father had him enter the Buddhist priesthood. In 1251 he went to Dazaifu in Kyushu to study under Shōtatsu

¹ *Ippen Shōnin Goroku* — 遍上人語録, compiled by the 52nd head of the Ji school, Ikkai 一海, in 1756 (?), edited by the Seizan scholar-monk Shunpō 俊鳳, and published in 1811. (Two earlier printings were destroyed by fire.) The letters are translated as given in this text, with numbers added. Other sections of the *Goroku* will appear in future issues of the *Eastern Buddhist*. Outlines of Ippen's life and thought have appeared twice in the *Eastern Buddhist*: Sugihira Shizutoshi, "The Teaching of Ippen Shōnin," Old Series vi, 3 (July 1934), and Yanagi Soetsu, "Ippen Shōnin," New Series vi, 2 (October 1973).

² According to the most widely accepted theory. Shōkai's close relationship is apparent from his early involvement with Ippen, though 29 years younger, but its precise nature is unclear. Possibly a child of Ippen's stepmother (see Ohashi Toshio, *Ippen, some kōdō to shiso*, p. 31), but some scholars have theorized that he was Ippen's own son.

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聖達, a disciple of Shokū 証空, the founder of the Seizan branch of Hōnen's Jōdo school. Ippen studied Jōdo doctrine for twelve years until 1263, when, upon his father's death, he returned home for a seven year period about which little is known. The *Hijiri-e* states:

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 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-dharma."

(Scroll 1, section 2)

Impelled by the desire to free himself from the round of birth-and-death, Ippen decided to give up secular life. Shōkai comments: "The Buddha taught that even sleeping in the mountains and forests is superior to diligence while in homelife. Moreover, there was an incident which reminded him of the sense of the saying, If they linger long in the village, hijiri and deer meet with disaster"¹(1, 2). It is not known what this incident was, but apparently a serious feud within the family had led to an attempt on his life.²

Thus, in 1271, at 33, Ippen set out to consult Shōtatsu about his decision. There is no record of this meeting and shortly after we find him on his way to distant Zenkō-ji. Kyushu at that time was being threatened with invasion by the Mongols, and as the local seat of the military government, Dazaifu can hardly have been suited for religious study. It is possible, however, that Ippen was seeking not more doctrinal learning, but rather a life of practice, and that Shōtatsu recommended the pilgrimage to Zenkō-ji, famed, because of its sacred image of Amida said to be from India, as "auspicious ground of the decisive settlement of birth" (1, 3). Here Ippen remained in retreat for a number of days and copied a painting of Shan-tao's parable of the rivers of blind passion traversed by the hairbreadth path of one's desire for the Pure Land. He then returned to Iyo where,

¹ Accounts suggest that Ippen killed or seriously injured an assailant, at the same time receiving a severe wound. Although disputes over the administration of family affairs seem the most likely cause, some sources speak of problems involving women, and specifically, of keeping two wives.

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in autumn of the same year, at Kubo-dera, he made a clearing in a secluded spot covered with blue moss and verdant ivy. There he built a hermitage with a pine gate and 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 demeanor—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.

(1, 4)

The non-duality expressed here of Amida's fulfillment of the Primal Vow and our attainment of birth in the utterance of *namu-amida-butsu* became a cornerstone of Ippen's teaching.

In order to verify his realization, Ippen moved to Sugō, also on Shikoku, which was famed as a place where Kannon had manifested herself, and also for its associations with Kūkai. Caves and rising peaks made it ideal for rigorous religious practice such as that of the *yamabushi*, 'mountain ascetics', and Ippen remained for six months:

Here the hijiri secluded himself and prayed for the fundamental resolve of renouncing this world. Revelations in dreams appeared to him frequently, inspiration that was indeed miraculous. . . . After going out from this place he abandoned house and property forever, detached himself from love and family, and gave up all temple halls and buildings to the three treasures of the Dharma-realm, and I, Shōkai, received charge of the altar image and sacred scriptures. He selected and arranged only the most essential scriptures, which became the equipment with which he furnished himself for his practice.

(11, 1)

At this point Ippen seems to have made a major decision to cease his solitary practice as a recluse and to take up a life of wandering (*yagyō*) which combined renunciation of any settled dwelling—whether house or temple—with travel throughout the country in bodhisattva-practice, bringing people into living contact with the Dharma. This form of life was pursued in Ippen's day by

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kanjin-hijiri who roamed the country spreading the nembutsu and had had a long tradition filled with legendary figures; Ippen himself singles out the Heian period monk Kūya, the "hijiri of the marketplace," as his predecessor. But among the various types of wanderer-monks, Ippen in particular was known as a *suta-hijiri*—a man who lived in abandonment (*suta*) of all attachment to things of the self and of this world—and he was to spend the last sixteen years of his life in constant travel which extended to all parts of the country.

From Sugō Ippen returned to Iyo, perhaps to settle the problematic affairs there for good, and then, in the second month of 1274, set out once more accompanied by a small party, possibly his own family.⁴ He made his way to Shitennō-ji, called "the center of the eastern gate of the Land of Bliss" because pilgrims were inspired with thoughts of Amida's land in the west by the view it afforded of the sun setting to the inland sea. "On this site Ippen attained true faith; making fast his aspiration for birth, he submitted priestly vows to refrain from the ten grave transgressions, received the Tathagata's precepts, and began to propagate the *ippen-nembutsu* for the salvation of sentient beings" (ii, 3). The *Hijiri-e* depicts Ippen standing at one of the temple gates surrounded by a group of people. Here he probably first engaged in handing out small strips of paper inscribed with Amida's Name, *namu-amida-butsu*, to passers-by. It is not known how Ippen settled on this method of propagation or precisely what significance he attached to it; there were, however, various precedents.

One of these was set by Ryōnin (1071–1132), the founder of Yūzū-nembutsu—"nembutsu of interpenetration"—in which, under the influence of Kegon and Tendai thought, the nembutsu of a single person was considered the practice of all and vice versa. Ryōnin toured the country writing the names of those who promised to recite the nembutsu one-hundred times in a record book. This register was regarded as proof of practice and thus of the attainment of birth, and through it Ryōnin created a body of nembutsu practice which transcended the bounds of time and space. It is said that, drawing on the same appeal of a tangible form to the spoken nembutsu, Ippen handed out nembutsu cards instead of recording names, still managing to keep a count of those who had attained birth. It seems also, however, given the centrality of the Name for Ippen and the rejection of any condition in the Vow, an eminently suitable expression of his teaching.

Another source of influence was probably Mt. Kōya, which Ippen visited the following summer. Here, in profound meditation,

⁴ The *Hijiri-e* depicts Shōkai and three nuns in accompaniment. Shōkai is reticent, but scholars generally identify the nuns as Ippen's wife and young daughter and a servant woman, commenting on Ippen's lingering emotional attachments and perhaps a joint repentance over the earlier incident.

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Kūkai awaits the spring when Maitreya will appear in this world and preach beneath the dragon-flower tree. Leaving behind a printing block of the six-character Name, he provided the altar image for sentient beings of the five defilements who are ever floundering [in the sea of birth-and-death]. For this reason Ippen went to pay his respects at the place where that great bodhisattva manifested himself, making his way far into the mountain so that he might seal his bonds for the same birth in the nine-ranked Pure Land. (II, 4)

The Shingon temple founded by Kūkai on Mt. Kōya was one of a number of religious centers which took on intense Jōdo Buddhist coloration during the Kamakura period, and it became the home of the Kōya-hijiri who, while based at special areas on Mt. Kōya, wandered through the country practicing Shingon-influenced nembutsu and spreading the teaching through a variety of activities. One of these was the distribution of rubbings of the Name made from blocks attributed to Kūkai himself, like the one mentioned here.

From Mt. Kōya, Ippen went on to Kumano, an ancient Shinto shrine whose deity had come to be regarded as a manifestation of Amida. On the way

there was a monk. Ippen said, "Please accept this card, raising faith that is one moment of mindedness (*ichinen*) and uttering *namu-amida-butsu*." The monk refused, saying, "At present faith that is one-mindedness does not arise in me. If I accepted your card, I would be breaking the precept against lying." Ippen said, "Don't you believe in the Buddha's teaching? Why can't you accept it?" The monk replied, "I do not doubt the teaching, but there is nothing I can do about faith not arising in me."

By that time a large number of pilgrims had gathered. If the monk did not take the card, neither would any of the others, so with great reluctance Ippen said, "Please accept it even if faith does not arise in you," and gave him the card. Seeing this, the other pilgrims all took one, and the monk went on his way.

Reflecting on this incident, Ippen decided that it was not without significance, and thinking that in the matter of propagating he should look to higher guidance, he prayed with this wish before the Shojo Hall of the main shrine at Kumano. When he had closed his eyes but not yet fallen asleep, the doors of the sacred hall were pushed open and a yamabushi with white hair and a long hood emerged. On the long verandah three-hundred other yamabushi touched their heads down in obeisance. At that moment Ippen realized that it was surely the Manifestation himself and entrusted himself completely. Then the yamabushi stepped before Ippen and said, "Hijiri spreading the

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nembutsu of interpenetration: how mistakenly you go about it! It is not through your propagation that sentient beings for the first time attain birth. In Amida Buddha's perfect enlightenment ten kalpas past the birth of all sentient beings was decisively settled as namu-amida-butsu. Distribute your cards regardless of whether there is faith or not, and without discriminating between purity and impurity."

Then Ippen opened his eyes and looked around. About one hundred children of twelve or thirteen came up and, holding out their hands, said, "Let us have your nembutsu." Taking the cards, they uttered namu-amida-butsu and went off. (III, 1)

Ippen came to speak of his teaching as the direct transmission from Amida in the form of the deity of the Kumano shrine, and in this revelation we find the seeds of his resolution of one of the nagging doctrinal difficulties which troubled Hōnen's followers. Hōnen taught that if one says the nembutsu, one can be born in the Pure Land through the Primal Vow. However, when his disciples attempted to formulate this teaching in more precise terms, a number of interrelated problems arose which might be seen at bottom as a tension between emphasis on either faith or practice, Vow or Name.

On the one hand, though a person should simply say the Name, the impulse to do so surely arises from faith in Amida's Vow and aspiration to be born in the Pure Land. Thus, is not faith in fact necessary and fundamental? If so, what precisely is the proper attitude for saying the Name and how should we go about attaining it? On the other hand, the Vow was designed specifically to save those who utter the Name. Since saying the Name is essential, is it not best simply to recite it as often as possible? In the monk's refusal to accept Ippen's card we see embodied the persistent dilemma facing the nembutsu practitioner: how does one act in accord with Amida's Vow?

Ippen's position, like that of Shinran, the other of Hōnen's descendants in the Dharma to stand as the founder of a sect, is to reject the question. As the Kumano revelation implies, attainment of birth does not depend on anything that is the product of a person's own designing or efforts to make himself the object of the Vow, whether assuming a certain mental or moral attitude or attaching a number to the nembutsu. However, once the artificial division between Vow and Name has been rejected, it might be said that while Shinran emphasizes the working of the power of the Vow, which manifests itself in *shinjin* (true entrusting), Ippen emphasizes the Name, the utterance of which, free of all self-attachment, is not a practice on our part but rather the realization or actualization of the nonduality of practitioner and Buddha in namu-amida-butsu.

For Ippen, all is subsumed—or presupposed—in the Name: the fulfillment of the Vow lies in the Name; the Pure Land was established to arouse sentient

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beings to utterance of the Name; birth is none other than the oneness of *namu* and *amidabutsu* in the Name; and as for practice, it is the Name that utters the Name. Faith in the teaching may be necessary as a start, but the instant it is perfected, it disappears to emerge in the utterance of *namu-amida-butsu*. This utterance occurs in "one thought-instant" or "one moment of mindedness" (*ichinen*) which penetrates to that which is ultimate and timeless, being identical with Amida's attainment. It thus pierces to that which is beyond birth-and-death in the present instant, and each instant of utterance becomes the moment of death and of birth in the Pure Land. This utterance, then, is the *nembutsu* of "one-totally" or "one-all" (*ikken*) in which all things continually reveal themselves to be the virtues of the Name.

Shin Buddhism also maintains a doctrine of the oneness of practitioner and Buddha, but here the oneness lies in *shinjin*, which is the true and real mind of man given by the Buddha through the working of the Vow. This mind, moreover, includes not only a oneness, but also a duality in which the true and real mind illumines for the first time the defiled karma and blind passion which is at the base of all the practitioner is and does. Thus it might be said that the realization of the futility of one's own devices arises truly only simultaneously with the attainment of *shinjin* through the working of the Dharma—without a person's being able to rid himself of his own attachments. In contrast to this, Ippen developed a Pure Land Buddhism in which the dichotomy of man and Buddha is thoroughly transcended in the Name, and in doing so he has, since his own day, invited comparisons with Zen, both with the realization experience in koan exercises and also, in his conception of the oneness of practice and attainment, with the *zazen* of Dōgen.

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(1) *REPLY TO AN IMPERIAL CONSORT, the younger sister of Lord Saionji,¹ who inquired about being given the Buddhist name, Ichi-amidabutsu (One-Amida Buddha)*

Be assured that I did propose the matter [of your name].² After the one thought-instant³ in which, realizing the transience of birth-and-death in our own flesh, we once truly and directly entrust ourselves through uttering *namu-amida-butsu*, 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. Thus, when we have entrusted ourselves to the wondrous Primal Vow of compassion that takes up our past commissions of the ten transgressions and the five damning acts as they are and in the present one or ten utterances extinguishes them, at last we realize that recompense in the three worlds and six paths is meaningless, and good and evil both become wearisome. Settled in the thought that ultimately there is nothing to depend on but *namu-amida-butsu*, which has been devised and provided out of the wisdom of the Buddha, we utter the Name until finally our breath ceases and life ends. This is what is known as "right-mindedness at the moment of death and birth into the Land of Bliss."⁴ *Namu-amida-butsu*.

¹ Empress of the retired emperor Kameyama. Became a nun at the age of 30 in 1283; died in 1318.

² Buddhist names ending in *-amidabutsu* were usually given to men among Ippen's followers, while *-ichibō* 一男 or *-butsubō* 仏男 were reserved for women; hence the inquiry. The practice of giving "-ami" names was initiated by Hōnen's disciple Shunjō-bō Chōgen, who encouraged the utterance of the Name by calling himself "Namu-amida-butsu." However, the custom is most closely associated with Ippen's Ji school and its significance is explained in this letter. Its use among men of the arts such as Kan-ami and Ze-ami, and particularly among renga poets, has its origins in the Ji school.

³ *Ichinen* 一念: *nen* is written with the character for "now" above that for "mind" and implies both an instant of time and an instantaneous act of the mind. The expression *ichi* (one) *nen* is used to mean: the shortest instant of time, that instant of realization or mindfulness, and one utterance of the Name.

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(2) *REPLY TO THE LAY-PRIEST TSUCHIMIKADO, former Minister of the Imperial Household,⁵ who requested an explanation of liberation from birth-and-death*

Utterance of the Name in Other Power is single practice surpassing conception. Amida's Primal Vow, which excels all things in the universe, is the direct path of liberation for foolish beings. It lies beyond the profound wisdom of the Buddhas; how, then, should it be probed by the minds of shallow wisdom of those of the three vehicles. Simply giving no ear to the various teachings of attaining the way, reciting the Name of the Primal Vow with the lips, and putting the heart and mind to no other use than uttering the Name is spoken of as, "Without doubt, without apprehension, riding in the power of the Vow and decidedly attaining birth."⁶ Our hearts and minds dying away as we say *namu-amida-butsu* is right-mindedness at the moment of death. At that moment we are blessed with the Buddha's coming to receive us and are born in the Land of Bliss: this is *nembutsu-birth*. *Namu-amida-butsu*.

(9) *ANSWER WRITTEN TO TÔ-NO-BEN,⁷ who asked about the settled mind (anjin) of the nembutsu*

Concerning the matter of *nembutsu-birth*: we sentient beings have, since the beginningless past, brought to completion great sins beyond count or measure—the ten transgressions, the five damning acts, the four grave evils, slander of the Dharma, lack of the faith-seed of Buddhahood, violation of precepts, violation of right views, and so on. Accordingly, we are beings who, transmigrating in birth-and-death into a future without

⁴ Right mindedness (正念 *shōnen*) is a term originally derived from contemplative practice. In traditional Jōdo teachings, the concentration or proper frame of mind at the very point of death was considered crucial, for the *nembutsu* uttered then was necessary for Amida's coming to take one to the Pure Land.

⁵ 土御門入道 Grandson of Minamoto Michichika. Became minister in 1269, retired the same year and received Buddhist orders in 1270. Died in 1286 at 65. According to the *Hijiri-e*, when Ippen was in Kyoto in 1284 Tsuchimikado visited him, and an exchange of poems and correspondence followed.

⁶ From the section *Sanzengi* of Shan-tao's *Commentary on the Meditation Sutra*, T.37, p. 271b.

⁷ 願弁 Unidentified. The *Ippen Shōnin eshiden* 一蓮上人絵詞伝, the text of another picture scroll, places this letter in the same period as Letter 2: summer of 1284, in Kyoto.

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end, must experience in the six paths, the four manners of birth, and the twenty-five forms of existence, all great suffering and affliction. Yet though it is thus, Bhiksu Dharmākara has realized, with the wisdom of his five kalpas of meditation, the Dharma of the Name that surpasses conception, and out of it has made the Primal Vow for the birth of foolish beings. Already, at the time when this Vow was fulfilled ten kalpas ago, it was determined that the act for birth of the sentient beings in the ten quarters would be *namu-amida-butsu*. Now that this essential body of enlightenment has come to be expressed by the Name, *Amida-butsu*, the man with the resolution to renounce this defiled world and aspire for the Pure Land need not make an issue of the faith or lack of faith, purity or impurity, sinfulness or innocence of his inborn condition. Simply rejoicing in having been able to hear this Name that surpasses conception, he utters *namu-amida-butsu* until at last his breath ceases and life ends. At that moment, without fail, he is blessed with the welcoming of the saintly host and attains accord with the realization of the Dharma beyond birth-and-death. This is *nembutsu-birth*. *Namu-amida-butsu*.

Ninth month 1st day
Ippen

To Lord Ben

(4) *WORDS ON THE DHARMA* written to a lord establishing bonds [for birth]

Because the establishing of bonds in the present world is for the sake of the next life, you should have no doubts about your reunion [with those born] in the Pure Land. Outside of the Name there is no practitioner or Buddha-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 the realization of the Dharma beyond birth-and-death, 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*.

Third month 9th day
Ippen

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(5) *REPLY WRITTEN TO BISHOP KŌGAN,*⁸ *who asked about the settled mind of nembutsu*

You have asked me to discuss the proper attitude of the nembutsu practitioner. Outside of the saying of *namu-amida-butsu*, there is no proper attitude whatever; outside of this, moreover, there is no settled mind to be discussed. There are a multitude of doctrines that have been established and left behind by the many wise masters, but they are all merely temporary statements made in response to different confusions. The nembutsu practitioner, then, should abandon these also and utter the nembutsu.

Once someone asked Kōya Shōnin how the nembutsu should be said, and he answered with only, "Abandon!" He added no other instruction. This is recorded in Saigyō's *Senjūshō*⁹ and is truly a saying of gold. 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.

When in this way one raises one's voice more and more in utterance, there is neither Buddha nor self; much less is there any reasoning here of this or that. The realms of good and evil are all the Pure Land. Outside of this, do not aspire, do not renounce. 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. It is not men alone who share in the all-transcending Vow.

Moreover, if the words of a foolish old man speaking thus are hard to make out, then leave them to their obscurity and abandon them also; and without deliberating or designing in any way at all, entrust yourself

⁸ 興顯僧都 Unidentified. This letter has also been translated by Sugihira, (see fn. in Introduction), and by D. T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, Second Series, (London, 1970), 350-51.

⁹ Lit. "selected anthology": a collection of Buddhist tales long attributed to the celebrated poet-monk but now presumed to be wholly or largely by other hands. It contains many stories of hijiri and the life of solitary religious practice, but, in its present form, not the one of Kōya mentioned here, the best known source for which is another collection on many of the same themes, Kamo no Chōmei's *Harshūshū* (1, 4).

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to the Primal Vow and utter the nembutsu. 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.

Namu-amida-butsu.

Ippen

To Bishop Kōgan

(6) *REPLY DISPATCHED TO SHINNEN SHŌNIN at Yokawa on Mt. Hiei*¹⁰

Encounters in this world come upon ties of friendship redolent through many lives; it is great joy to be together in taking refuge in one Buddha.

Birth-and-death is illusion in self-attachment; enlightenment is the one mind in detachment from self-delusion. Since birth-and-death is originally nothing, one may engage in study, but it cannot be thus overcome. Since enlightenment is originally nothing, one may engage in practice, but it cannot be thus attained. Nevertheless, those who do not study wander deeper and deeper in illusion, and those who do not practice wind further and further [in the cycle of birth-and-death]. Therefore we must abandon our bodies and practice, exhaust our minds and endeavor.

With regard to this truth, though the terms used in the Path of Sages and the Pure Land path differ, ultimately they are one. Thus the *Lotus Sutra* encourages: "We will not hold our lives dear, but cherish only the supreme Way";¹¹ and the *Meditation Sutra* teaches: "Abandon the self in other worlds and with certainty be born in that Land."¹² Hence, in the Path of Sages, which is the practice of self-power, it is a matter of course that one must cast away the life of the self and thus elucidate the Way. In the Pure Land path, since it is the practice of Other Power, we entrust our lives to the Buddha, and after this life runs out we realize Buddha-

¹⁰ 真縁上人 Unidentified. The *Hijiri-s*, describing a trip near Kyoto, states: "It had been said that Ōmi province was largely the domain of Mt. Hiei and that instructions prohibiting the taking of refuge [in the nembutsu] had for a long time been circulated about. However, there was a visit from Shinnen Shōnin of Yokawa and the two formed a fast friendship" (vii, 1). The scroll places this meeting in 1283-84.

¹¹ Chapter 13, T.9, p. 36c.

¹² T.12, p. 342a.

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nature. Hence foolish beings like ourselves should not seek a path of liberation outside of wholehearted utterance of the Name. In the *Amida Sutra* are the words: "It is certain that those who say the nembutsu are blessed with the protecting thoughts of the Buddhas throughout the six directions, numberless as the sands of the Ganges, and that their succeeding birth [in the Pure Land] is decisively settled."¹³ Besides simply these six characters—*na-mu-a-mi-da-butsu*—we have no body or mind; widely pervading all sentient beings, the Name is the one-totality (*ippen*).

Further, does not the matter of purple clouds and heavenly flowers¹⁴—these being auspicious signs of the saying of the Name that surpasses conception—lie beyond the measure and calculation of foolish beings? We must, exhausting our foolish minds, well discern those flowers also.

I have finished performing the *Amida Sutra* one-hundred times for the establishing of bonds [with the Dharma] as you requested. Humbly.
Namu-amida-butsu.

Fourth month 22nd day
Ippen

To Shinnen Shōnin

(7) *WORDS ON THE DHARMA* written for one who inquired about the nembutsu teaching¹⁵

"Birth through nembutsu" means that nembutsu as such is birth. *Namu* is the heart that entrusts, *Amida-butsu* the practice entrusted in: the one thought-instant in which heart and practice mutually correspond is birth. The person who, after uttering *namu-amida-butsu*, does not deliberate upon the good and bad or the right and wrong of his own heart and exercises no expectations of his utterance is called a practitioner decisively settled in true entrusting. Outside of the utterance of the Name in this present instant there can be no moment of facing death. Simply utter

¹³ Paraphrase of T.12, p. 348a, 8-11.

¹⁴ Traditional motifs of the Pure Land, but also occasionally seen at deathbed and commonly regarded as auspicious signs of Amida's coming and the attainment of birth. The *Hijiri-s* records: "At the practice hall [where Ippen was staying], towards the end of the third month (1282), purple clouds gathered and flowers began to fall. Afterward, this miraculous omen occurred quite often at different times. When someone, wondering at this, inquired of Ippen, he said, 'Concerning the flowers ask the flowers, about purple clouds ask purple clouds: I do not know'" (VI, 1).

¹⁵ In the *Esokiden* this letter occurs in the section for the fifth month, 1282.

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namu-amida-butsu, namu-amida-butsu, and make the ending of your life the finish. *Namu-amida-butsu.*

(8) *WORDS ON THE DHARMA* written for one [in reclusive life] who inquired about the teaching¹⁶

Though spring passes and autumn comes on, difficult is it to advance upon the essential path of liberation. We feel regret at the [scattering] blossoms and gaze upon the moon, and yet the delusions of transmigration arise easily. Without our knowing, clouds of blind passion are thick about the mountain of our karmic evil and the light of the Buddha-sun does not come through to our eyes. Permanently over the sea of birth-and-death the winds of impermanence rush, so that never can the moon of True Suchness abide.

As we continue to receive birth, suffering is laden upon suffering, and each time we return to death, we make our way out of darkness into a further darkness. Along the crossroads of the six paths there is nowhere we do not stray; at the gateways of the four manners of birth there is no dwelling in which we do not take shelter. Should we call this very round of transformations in birth-and-death dream or real? When we think to say it is, it rises in clouds and vanishes like smoke; there is no one who keeps his shadowy form in the empty sky. When we think to say it is *not*, we still find, dwelling within our hearts, the grief of separation from one we loved, which does not fail to cut to the bowels and confuse the soul.

Though in sleeves "sweetly scented from ties of friendship with a virtuous man"¹⁷ one may cremate the body with flames of lamentation, the ice of the hells called Crimson Lotus and Great Crimson Lotus will not thaw. Beneath the quilt of the mandarin duck one's eyes may be wet with tears of compassion, but the flames of the hells called Scorching Heat and Great Scorching Heat will not be quenched. Grieving in vain, sorrowing in vain, you wander in confusion and others also. Rather, you should go quickly from this village—this ring of grief that is the three realms—and immediately make your pilgrimage to the capital of the nine ranks of lotus seats.

Here, it is impossible to part easily from this world of pain and suffering,

¹⁶ Placed in about 1283 in the *Estiden*.

¹⁷ Allusion to a saying of Confucius: "To become familiar with a good man and not part from him is like entering a fragrant room."

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and the realm of the non-created cannot be attained while leading an indifferent life. When we have chanced to encounter the dominant condition [for birth], the Primal Vow, if we are not quick to be diligent, in what life will we attain the end? Utterance of the Name in Other Power is single practice that surpasses conception. The all-transcending Primal Vow is the essential path of liberation for foolish beings. Forget your self and entrust with joy; and leaving all to the voice, recite the nembutsu.

Namu-amida-butsu.

(9) *WORDS ON THE DHARMA* written when slightly ill and given to disciples

Birth-and-death at its original source has as its form the momentary mind of the union of man and woman, and our aimless wandering through the three realms [of desire, form, and formlessness] is characterized by the delusion of the illusive situation of sexual attachment. If the forms of man and woman were to rend and of itself the illusive situation were to die away, the truth that birth-and-death is originally nothing would become manifest and delusion would here come to an end. To admire the blossoms or to enjoy the moonlight often turns into karma for transmigration. Thinking of the Buddha and thinking of the sutras can occasionally become the flames of hell. The original source of the one mind alone is of itself non-thinking, and the functioning of this non-thinking relates truly to the dharma-realm. The one mind pervades the three-thousand worlds, but is from its very origin always unmoving. Yet though it is so, men lose sight of the truth of things-as-they-are and take up the will of their desires; they wander in birth-and-death, which is in truth empty and nothing, and seek an enlightenment which is but phantasmal. Such foolish and lowly people as this should, deepening their resolution to renounce this defiled world and aspire for the Pure Land, rejoice in the exhausting of the breath and the ending of life. In expectation of the coming of the saintly host they should utter the Name of Amida so that they may, at the moment of death and the severing of life, be in accord with the realization of the Dharma beyond birth-and-death. *Namu-amida-butsu.*

Kōan 7 (1284)

Fifth month 29th day

Ippen

LETTERS

(10) *THE FINAL INSTRUCTION* (taken down by the disciple, Master *Shōkai*)¹⁸

In the five aggregates¹⁹ there is no sickness to afflict sentient beings; in the four elements²⁰ there is no blind passion to torment us. But we turn our backs on the one thought-instant of original nature, and making the five desires our home and the three poisons²¹ our sustenance, we take on the pain and suffering of the three evil paths: this is the truth of receiving the fruit of one's own acts. As it is thus, apart from raising ourselves, in our own minds, the one thought-instant of uttering the Name, it is not possible even for the compassion of the Buddhas of the three worlds [of past, present and future] to save us. *Namu-amida-butsu*.

¹⁸ The *Hijiri-e* records this letter and its circumstances: "Eighth month, 2nd day (1289). Ippen sat on a rope mat facing the south and spoke of the Dharma. . . . Priests and laymen beyond number listened. Shōkai was at his right, and Ippen had him take up a brush and record the Dharma-teaching. When he had made a clean copy and read it aloud, Ippen said repeatedly: 'After my death, some of you will probably cast yourselves [into the sea]. If the settled mind has been established, whatever may happen your [birth] is certain; however, if your self-attachment has not been exhausted, this must not be done. Hard to receive is the human life which encounters the Buddha-path: how lamentable it would be to cast it away in vain.' With tears falling he went on, 'This is the reason for writing this down and leaving it behind. You should well take heed'" (XI, 4). The *Hijiri-e* depicts seven of Ippen's followers throwing themselves into the sea on the day of his death.

¹⁹ The elements which make up the body and mind of beings: matter, perception, conception, motivation, consciousness.

²⁰ Earth, water, fire, air.

²¹ Greed, anger and folly.