

## ARTICLE

### **The Burning House**

*The following article is a transcription of a Dharma talk that Rev. Master Koten gave to the community recently. It has been lightly edited for reading purposes.*

Homage to the Buddha, homage to the Dharma, homage to the Sangha.

The first of the 16 Precepts are the Three Refuges, and the first of the Three Refuges is to take refuge in, or homage to, the Buddha. The second is homage to the Dharma, and the third is homage to the Sangha, "homage" meaning to turn toward and place one's reliance in.

And the Buddha Refuge consists of three layers. It says, "The first is the true source of the Three Treasures. The second is the appearance in the past, and the third is the appearance in the present time."

The Buddha said, "O monks there is an unborn, uncreated, unformed, undying. If it were not so, there would be absolutely no meaning to, or transcendence of, or significance to the formed, the created, the born, and the dying."

The knowledge of the unborn within oneself...as it says, "the palace of the Buddha Nature" is within ourselves, the unborn calling constantly to us, and our response to this. That is why we need never worry about the sincerity of our own wish to train ourselves, for that comes from the Unborn rather than from our own selfish desires.

The call of the Unborn is initially the little niggle within our minds and hearts and bodies. We don't initially know where it is coming from. The little niggle, the little call, the little beckoning to come outside. As the Lotus Scripture says, "to come outside, to come out of the burning house." To come out from, to come out of meaninglessness, to come out of constant sorrow. To come out of the burning house into the cool of the courtyard.

We know suffering. And the call to come out of it--to come out of the burning house--can be very, very frightening or even terrifying; because we do not know what is there. Suffering and discomfort we know, but we do not know what will happen if we let go of it. Our selfishness is deeply distrustful of not having a place to stand. And our selfishness suspects, if I can put it that way, that if it comes out of the suffering that it knows, there will be no place to stand, no place to grasp. And that is, in fact, true. Although that very lack of a place to stand is freedom.

Every person hears this beckoning within themselves. Those capable of ignoring it will find that eventually it quiets down. But there are those for whom ordinary answers will not suffice and for whom the beckoning does not quiet down. Therefore, they must take the risk of coming out of the burning house, the risk of not knowing what is on the other side of the door, the risk of not knowing what I shall do when the familiar is no longer there.

In fact, everything is like this already. It is just that some people wish to acknowledge it, wish to live real lives, wish to acknowledge reality, because they know they can never be content otherwise. If you are one of those people, there is no way around it but to take responsibility for what one senses and knows and to leave the burning house.

For some people, trying to prop up the burning house--or reorganize it or put out the various fires that they can--all seem to them a good thing. For others, this is no solution, and therefore they have to find the means of stepping out of the burning house. Fortunately this is not complicated. Fortunately, this is not difficult. For "the palace of the Buddha Nature is within ourselves, and the Light of the Lord is everywhere." The distance between is not very great at all. It intersects at the human heart. It is why we say, "turn around and look within."

Turn around and look within. Turn the light around. Turn the heart around. Turn around and look. Turn around and face the light.

Homage to all the Buddhas in all worlds. Homage to all the Bodhisattvas in all worlds. Homage to the Scripture of Great Wisdom.