

## The Development of Pine Mountain Temple

By Rev. Master Seikai

A temple is a living and evolving thing, being part of the life of the universe, which fills all things in all directions. The same is true of all people, and when people enter into a temple, they become part of the life of that temple, and have an immediate impact upon it. No one person can ever be in charge of a temple, because it is so much larger than what an individual person can direct; indeed, we are not even in direct control of our own lives. At best, we can enter into a cooperative relationship with the life of the universe in order to live at peace within it, and learning how to do this is the underlying purpose of a temple.

Pine Mountain Temple was moved to its present location in the Ozena Valley (*Ozena* is derived from the Spanish *Ochena*, which translates as an irritation of the nostrils or sinuses, i.e. sinusitis) in 2000, having been previously located in Santa Barbara for 21 years. We have all the challenges that come with 45 acres of land, three residential houses, the various utility buildings on our property, and the animals. Originally we had hoped to have a small monastic Sangha of five people, but only Rev. Master Phoebe remains from the group that moved to Pine Mountain; I joined her later that year when I moved from Shasta Abbey. Over the past nine years, we have had various monks join our small community for varying periods of time, most recently Rev. Leon, who spent four years with us.

The temple continues to grow and evolve regardless of exactly who lives in it, how many members we have or who visits it. Rev. Master Phoebe and I realize that we are not in control of that flow and change, but rather are part of it and custodians of it. That flow is always positive, and at times when we are tempted to think otherwise, the training we are doing helps to reaffirm a positive attitude towards all change, all events. It is said that nothing disrupts the peace of a temple more than anger in all its various forms, ranging from disappointed expectations, irritation and impatience all the way through disrespect and despair. We know from experience how important it is to put down our own agenda of personal ambition or sense of accomplishment in order to remain in harmony with every other living thing around oneself. The same is true of our relationship with inanimate things, which are also part of the life of the universe. This how to cultivate the harmony with our own hearts that we all long for.

There are several unfinished projects currently at Pine Mountain Temple, which we are continuing to work on to the best of our ability. As a general rule, as time goes on and the monks continue to age, we are able to do less of the hard work involved with those projects; concurrently, we are better able to hire skilled people to come in and accomplish various jobs. So Rev. Master Phoebe and myself are becoming increasingly involved in coordinating the efforts of people who come and go rather than trying to do everything ourselves. The

following is a review of the major projects that we have undertaken, and the prospects for completing them.

### **The Stupa Surround**

In 2002 we purchased the 25 acre property to the north of the original temple land; at the time our thinking was that even if we could not afford to pay it off, at least we would be in control of who we would, in turn, sell the property to. As it happened, last year we paid off all the debts accrued in buying the land—in six years rather than the ten we anticipated that it would take. It was our good fortune to be free of debt just as the recession that has plagued the American economy hit hard.

The idea to build a stupa on the land began to percolate up about four years ago, and then we learned about the stupa built at Amaravati Monastery in England from a Theravada monk in 2006. By the following year we had raised some of the money and gotten the plans approved by Ventura County by the end of the fall. We waited until spring of last year to begin construction, and the stupa itself was finished by the end of last fall. This year has been a hiatus until now, in late August, we are set to continue work on the Surround and complete it. The stone mason who last year finished the stonework on the Stupa dome, will be constructing the Surround. That work should be completed in the near future.

It is still too early to say exactly when the entire Stupa project will be completed, and we will hold the dedication ceremony for it. But at this writing it is looming nearer on the horizon, and will it will be a wonderful, joyful occasion to bring this project to completion. The four Buddha statues that will complete the Mandala of the Five Dhyani Buddhas, are currently being created for us by the stone carvers in Indonesia that provided all the stone for the actual Stupa.

[insert photograph of work on the surround]

### **The Two Meditation Huts**

The first meditation hut was built two years ago in the Middle Canyon, and subsequently moved to the east yard of the Sangha House last fall, at the request of the Ventura County Fire Department. The new location makes the hut a bit more usable given its close proximity to bathrooms in the Sangha House.

The second meditation hut, or retreat cabin, is currently under construction in the west yard of the Sangha House. The foundation was put in this spring, then Rev. Seikai and Greg began work on the framing over the summer. There is currently a hiatus on this project while we turn our attention to the Stupa Surround, but we have every intention of returning to it as soon as possible. Hiring a skilled worker to help with this building is a likelihood at some point in the

next several months. It remains to be seen exactly how the building will be used once it is completed, as there are different possible needs and uses to consider. It is 146 square feet in size, just big enough to accommodate a person for longer periods of residence.

### **The Arrival of Venus the Horse**

On Sunday afternoon, July 19, a dog alarm alerted me to the presence of a Miniature horse trying to drink from the Kanzeon fountain in front of the Dharma House. The little horse, which is no more than three feet high at the shoulder, was clearly looking for a good home and after a few days we located her owner—she had gone by the name Tiny—and bought her. Her previous owner has happy to see her go to a good home, and she showed no inclination whatsoever to go back to where she'd come from.

It is an ancient tradition for Buddhist temples to liberate animals from a difficult life and give them refuge. As the morning star was shining brightly in the pre-dawn sky when she presented herself at the temple, we named the little horse Venus. Venus is very bright herself, likes carrots and watermelon and talks a lot. She appears to be in good health; her age has been estimated at about 9 or 10 by the ferrier who came to trim her hooves. She has explored our 45 acres and gone on to visit our neighbor's solitary Arabian horse for company. Venus has been given a halter, vaccinations and hoof trimming, and we hope to build her a small shelter in the near future.

That, of course, will be another project. Our plan is to fence off the area called the "Homestead Field", build the shelter within it, thus creating a safe and secure environment for Venus. She loves her food and spends most of the day wandering over our fields foraging. As with many things before, Venus' arrival was not planned—she simply appeared. Once she appeared, it became obvious over the course of the next several days that she belonged here and it was a good thing to adopt her, whatever that might entail in the way of expenses, added responsibilities and work.

[insert horse photograph]

### **The Arrival of a New Quan Yin Statue**

On Sunday, August 9, a moving crew of strong men and one small woman, led in procession by Dee and Brigitte, brought up the slightly larger than human scale statue of Quan Yin that had been promised to the temple years ago by the Reverend Thich Thong Hai of the An Lac Mission in Ventura. The Vietnamese Buddhists at An Lac Mission had acquired an even taller marble statue, and when that arrived, the smaller one was ready to take her position at Pine Mountain Temple and pour her compassion out over our valley. We are

deeply moved by this gesture of friendship and have invited the An Lac monks and congregation to join us in a dedication ceremony on September 13.

Our new statue occupies the spot in front of the Middle Canyon, where previously there was the seated Quan Yin on a yellow pedestal, all sitting on a recycled concrete base. That Quan Yin statue moved to the front gate, and her pedestal has been repainted green. The Amitabha Buddha statue which occupied *that* spot is for the moment sitting atop our water well.

[insert statue photograph]

In the midst of whatever we happen to be doing on the external level, the internal work of meditation continues from one day to the next. What we do on the external level invariably reflects what is going on internally, illustrating the words of the Buddha that “the mind is the forerunner of all things.” Thus, we don’t strain to accomplish things, start or finish projects, etc. in the temple, lest those things begin to eclipse the importance of our truly important work, which is the work of training the mind—meditation—and living morally sound and peaceful lives—keeping the Buddhist Precepts. Thus there is a deeply happy way to live, in which we do not force anything in particular to happen, but rather accept the unfolding of life as it is, with an enduring faith that everything that we do is an expression of our training, and an offering to the Three Treasures. The dance between human plans and designs and the actual unfolding of reality is an endlessly fascinating thing to be a part of—provided that we do not struggle against it. All things come to fruition when all the necessary conditions ripen, and then our faith and our training are rewarded by that completion.

### **Knowing a Better Way to Live**

The Buddha taught:

“Do not pursue the past,  
Do not lose yourself in the future.  
The past no longer is,  
The future is yet to come.  
Looking deeply at life as it is  
in the very here and now,  
the practitioner dwells  
in stability and freedom.  
We must be diligent today.  
To wait until tomorrow is too late.  
Death comes unexpectedly.  
How can we bargain with it?  
The sage tells a person who knows  
how to dwell in mindfulness  
night and day

'one who knows  
the better way to live alone.'"

--From *Teachings of the Buddha*, edited by Jack Kornfield.