

Long Distance Training at Pine Mountain Temple

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I have been asked why I train at Pine Mountain and live in Montana and I often wonder what it would be like to live near Pine Mountain and train as most of the Sangha members do. I didn't plan things this way, it is something that came about in my life from a suggestion by a friend I met at Shasta Abbey, and the following is more about my experience than a direct answer to the question.

First, I would like to describe my practice. I sit every morning—mostly. The first thing I did when starting a home practice was to realize that if I was going to make it in the long run, I would need to be gentle with myself—so if I miss a morning meditation, I make an effort to meditate in the evening and whatever happens, it's ok. This forgiveness of self has led to a very steady practice. My attitude is one of looking forward to meditation time by not making it another thing I “have to do” in a day. After a meditation period, I practice singing a scripture from the Pine Mountain *Book of Ceremonies* and, if time permits, I do a short bit of reading in a comfortable chair with a cup of tea—another gentleness. In the evening I recoup the day, send merit to my children, give thanks, and go to bed.

Sundays are different: I listen to a lecture on tape that I've gotten from Pine Mountain or Shasta Abbey, or read more, just sitting in that comfortable chair a little longer and absorbing what I've read or heard. Also, each week, usually on Sunday, I write to Rev. Master Phoebe and she writes back. The message begins with a weather report and moves on. This keeps me very connected to the temple and training.

These practices, plus trips to Pine Mountain, are what I have worked out for now as my practice. It is a source of strength and I enjoy watching it grow.

Coming to Pine Mountain takes planning much the same as when leaving the home for several weeks. The first decisions are around when, how and for how long. There are many other lives to consider before choosing a time, foremost the monks, and no matter how I arrive in California, I am dependent on others to actually get to Pine Mountain—sometimes the monks, or the Sunday bus, or helpful Sangha members. I live alone, so householder chores, living things, and banking must be projected and cared for. Work life must be wrapped up with ends tied and put away with reassurances that all will be well until I return. Usually it is.

It is a commitment on my part, and a trust that others will help me along the way. Commitment is easier than trust for me.

When I arrive, road weary and jangled, it feels as though I am home. Much has changed, and much stays the same. The first place to go to is the meditation hall, where it is always different, and yet, blessedly, the same. I spend a day going around looking at work projects I've done over the years—the plants that continued to live after planting, and the ones that didn't. I don't spend too much time remembering what used to be where, but more enjoying the change in development of the temple. It is always wonderful.

Then there is the pleasure of experiencing those things I do not have at home: a meditation hall, meditating with others, a regular service, others to live with who are also training, a different way of doing things that is not always up to me to decide about. I sometimes think of it as a total immersion course for the body, mind and spirit. I am cut off from, and away from, all of my usual distractions. There is me, without my phone and computer, without my books and Friday night movie, without my personal food habits, in a place I'm not sure I can walk out of if I decide I've had enough. I have put myself there, to train with the teachings of the Buddha, taught by Reverend Masters, in the valleys of high mountains, because it is the best thing I have ever done for myself and the rest of the world.

So I sit. And work a little, eat a little, and sit. And sit, again. It doesn't take long for the real work to begin and my "warts" to begin to show. Usually I get through it with a little help from my friends, the monks of Pine Mountain.

I used to cry when it was time to leave and return to my own mountains in Montana, but then I learned to carry the meditation with me. And, when I get home, much is the same and I feel different.

If pressed for an answer to the original question—why do I train at Pine Mountain and live in Montana—I would have to say something blunt, such as, "I like it. It does me good." I look forward to seeing you all again.
