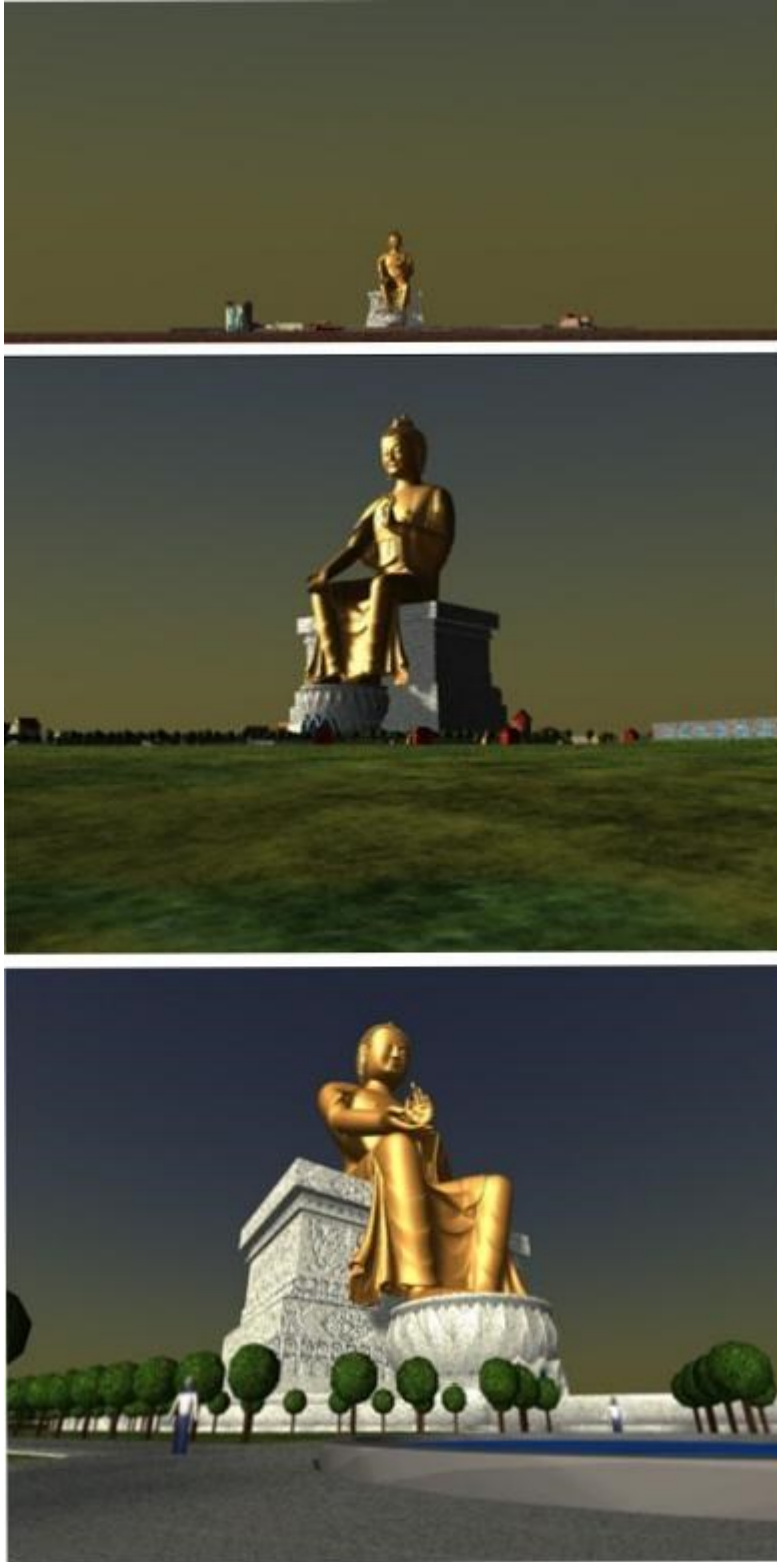


Maitreya Project Trust in Kushinagar – update October 2014



Proposed Maitreya Buddha Statue

Maitreya Project History – A Quick Recap;

Lama Yeshe initiated the Maitreya Project in 1982 after returning from his first visit to Tibet since fleeing in 1959.

Lama's vision was to build a huge statue of Maitreya, the future Buddha in Bodhgaya, Bihar State. The statue would achieve several goals.

The first was to make a statement that the loving kindness Maitreya Buddha will embody, is the most critical human quality, and the only cause of peace and happiness in human society.

The statue had to be huge to make such a statement and to move people's minds and bring about the understanding that loving kindness is so important to humanity.

A second goal was Lama Yeshe felt to offer such a great monument as a token of gratitude for the kindness Government of India and Indian society showed in receiving and accommodating Tibetans from 1959 onwards.

Despite many difficulties, setbacks, and challenges, the Project has moved forward and Lama Yeshe's vision developed under the spiritual guidance of Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche.

Decision to move the Project to Uttar Pradesh

By 2001 Bihar had become an extremely difficult place to work. The law and order environment had been deteriorating for more than a decade and Government at all levels was essentially dysfunctional. Although by this time Maitreya Project was far advanced in planning and design of a magnificent statue building in Bodhgaya, the extraordinarily adverse circumstances in Bihar, forced the difficult decision to relocate the Project to Uttar Pradesh where the State Government welcomed Maitreya Project and the prospect of it's helping to develop the Eastern part of Uttar Pradesh.

The reason Kushinagar was selected from among several potential sites is explained by Rinpoche; "The State Government of Uttar Pradesh previously had the idea to build a large Buddha statue when they heard that the great Buddha statues of Bamiyan were destroyed. Then State Government heard about the Maitreya Project and on a number of occasions requested His Holiness the Dalai Lama to bring the Maitreya Project to Uttar Pradesh. The State Government offered several possible sites and we sought His Holiness' advice as to which would bring the greatest benefit to the greatest number of people for the longest time.

On a visit to Bodhgaya, in 2002, His Holiness suggested that we should check where to build the Maitreya statue, because in Bodhgaya there had been so many obstacles. In front of the main Guru Shakyamuni Buddha statue inside the Bodhgaya Mahabodhi Temple, His Holiness Dalai Lama used the traditional 'dough ball' method of divination. This was done very carefully and

His Holiness held my hand while conducting the investigation himself and the answer came ... Kushinagar.”

The State Government offered the land in Kushinagar and prospects looked bright but in Uttar Pradesh, Maitreya Project faced a different set of challenges. A comprehensive shared vision for the Project was developed together with the State Government and a Memorandum of Understanding was signed in 2003. Actualizing the MoU and shared vision took a further 10 years of relentless efforts on the side of the Maitreya Project team.

Bodhgaya on hold for 10 years until 2012

While the Project worked towards locating in Uttar Pradesh, and with continuing difficulties in Bihar, plans for Bodhgaya were put on hold and remained so until 2012. By this time the situation in Bihar had improved significantly under a new Bihar State Government. Companies were moving back into Bihar, law and order had been restored, and all around there was new optimism. Lama Zopa Rinpoche decided that Maitreya Project in Bodhgaya could go ahead albeit with a slightly different vision. That meant there would now be 2 Maitreya Projects in adjacent States - both part of the, “Buddhist Circuit”, each with many holy sites denoting where Buddha Shakyamuni visited and taught.

Two Maitreya Projects

Lama Zopa Rinpoche explained the 2 Maitreya Projects, in a letter of February 2014 which may be read in full at;

<https://fpmt.org/wp-content/uploads/projects/other/maitreya/LZR-letter-2-MPs-0214.pdf>

The following paragraphs are extracted from Rinpoche’s letter;

“My very dear students, kind benefactors, friends and others who have compassion to sentient beings – not just compassion, but taking responsibility too free all sentient beings from the oceans of samsaric sufferings – to all, I am expressing hello and hope you are all well.

Now we have two Maitreya Projects in India. As you may have already heard, Maitreya Project Bodhgaya has started and the process is happening, but now the statue will be smaller; this is due to the situation of the world and my advice. Maitreya Project Bodhgaya has been taking a long time. The reason is that there were many and continual difficulties which arose principally from trying to operate in an environment of political dysfunction at that time.

The other Maitreya Project is happening in Kushinagar – Maitreya Buddha Kushinagar Project. Kushinagar is where the Buddha showed the holy deed of passing away and where the future Buddha Maitreya will take birth, which is part of the 12 deeds.

.....Due to karma these two projects happened, so now we need to complete both of these Maitreya statues for the benefit of all sentient beings. In addition to these projects, I also want to build other large Maitreya statues in different parts of the world.

.....Then the particular benefits: the more statues of Maitreya Buddha there are in the world the more it helps to minimize or stop wars, famine, diseases, tsunamis, fires, hurricanes, earthquakes, etc. in this very dark period when so many people suffer so much. Due to the result of building many Maitreya statues, this decreases the very dark time of so much suffering. So this is my reason for building many Maitreya statues.”...

With much love and prayers,
Lama Zopa”

Rinpoche’s explanation of the 2 Projects continued on another occasion as follows;

“For the Kushinagar Maitreya Project, there is a plan to develop it with other traditions of Buddhism, not only Tibetan Buddhism's four lineages. The traditions or entities which join FPMT in developing the Kushinagar land would have their own area, and draw up their own plans under the oversight and with the approval of Maitreya Project Kushinagar. However FPMT would work with them as a group. This joint collaboration would develop a Conference Centre with the goal of promoting better inter tradition communication. The Maitreya Statue would be about 13 stories in height. The total land area will be about 270 acres.”

Maitreya Buddha Project Kushinagar

In October 2012 it was decided the 2 Projects – Bodhgaya and Kushinagar - would best develop under separate management teams and with different names in order to minimise confusion.

The Project in Kushinagar is managed by the Maitreya Project Trust and will use the name, “Maitreya Project Trust”, or, “ MPT.

Maitreya Project Trust logo

Maitreya Project Trust has a new logo devised by Lama Zopa Rinpoche and beautifully drawn by artist Sonam Sherpah who is also preparing a colour version for MPT.



Foundation Stone Laying Ceremony December 2013

As previously reported, in December 2013 State Government of Uttar Pradesh under the dynamic leadership of Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav, convened a spectacular Foundation Stone Laying Ceremony on the land granted to the Project in Kushinagar.

The land is extraordinarily precious in that it is adjacent to the Maha Parinirvana shrine denoting the place where Buddha Shakyamuni passed into Maha Parinirvana. On three sides the land encloses, the Ramabhar Stupa – the cremation site of Shakyamuni Buddha.



Details and pictures of the Foundation Stone Laying Ceremony were published previously and maybe found at;

<http://fpmt.org/projects/other/maitreya/kushinagar/>

Briefly however, a hundred thousand people attended the colorful ceremony presided over by Lama Zopa Rinpoche and Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav. The proceedings included cultural dance performances and speeches.



Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav and Lama Zopa Rinpoche at the Foundation Stone Laying ceremony in Kushinagar

What took so long?

The ceremony marked a huge milestone after 10 years of largely invisible, tedious, but constant and continual work. What is not obvious is the fact that the Indian administrative system constantly rotates its administrative officials. In addition, State level politicians also change. Working with both groups means an almost constant process of meeting new people in positions of authority the Project has to deal with. Each time a new person comes into a position, there is a learning process and period of time in which the project has to present the vision to the new officer, explain the benefits of the Project, and request their support so that the legalities move forward. Since moving to Uttar Pradesh the Project has met, made presentations to, and interacted with, probably 100 officers who have rotated through these positions. Sometimes rotations happen suddenly without notice and the effect on the Project is disruptive. Keeping the Project moving through such circumstances is a truly daunting task yet with never flagging enthusiasm the Maitreya Project Trust team based in Gorakhpur has done a superb job supported by the Trustees in Delhi, the Governing Body, and the Management Team.

The December Ceremony renewed everyone's confidence and enthusiasm in the Kushinagar Project.

When will the Project move onto the land?

Even now, the bureaucratic process is continuing and is not yet complete. New officers have again been appointed. The last part of the land acquisition process will be a final ratification by the State Cabinet, of the Memorandum of Understanding between Government and Maitreya Project Trust, and also the terms of lease deed by which the Project will occupy the land in perpetuity.

Our team are feeling confident and our best estimates are that the Project could take possession of approximately 200 acres of land by the end of 2014.

Once that happens and all legalities are settled the Project will finally move on to the land, begin fencing the boundary, setting up office, and moving the 24 feet Maitreya statue from Bodhgaya land to the Kushinagar site.

Commencement of Medical Program



The MPT Medical Program team visiting local villages

In the meantime in March this year, the Kushinagar medical program commenced in March 2014 with exploratory visits to local villages impacted in some way by Maitreya Project. The Project team travelled in a large van purchased by MPT for use as a mobile clinic - on this occasion offering education on key health issues by means of street theatre. These include hygiene and the dangers of alcohol abuse. The program began a dialogue with Village officials on the viability of setting up Village Health Committees to monitor programs offered and to give feedback and advice. Since then there has been no further activity. Later in the year in preparation for the launch of a full Mobile Health Clinic program, the van will travel to Delhi to be professionally fitted out as a mobile clinic. There will be an air-conditioned examination room, and a dispensary with dispensing window in the side of the vehicle. The vehicle will carry seating and an awning that can be set up as a waiting area outside. The next few weeks will see recruitment

of male and female doctor, nurses, and support staff, to facilitate expansion of the medical program.

Anti-Malaria and Blanket Distribution Programs

September saw the commencement of the Maitreya Project Health Camp and anti-malaria program. With the kind assistance of the Kushinagar District Magistrate's Office, the Project distributed an initial 1,000 mosquito nets together with pamphlets giving advice on malaria and other disease prevention. Eligible families received tokens against which they collected their nets.



Maitreya Project Health Camp –mosquito net distribution with MPT mobile clinic van parked alongside



District Magistrate Kushinagar, and Lama conducting the distribution



Villagers lining up to receive mosquito nets

Hundreds of people lined up in orderly fashion to receive their nets and the event was extremely successful. The Project will distribute an additional 2,500 nets during October 2014.

In mid-December the Project will distribute 3,500 woollen blankets to provide relief to the poor of the villages during the coldest weeks of the year.



Primary Healthcare Education in the Villages

Thank you most sincerely all who have so patiently followed, supported, and encouraged, the Project over so many years. Things are beginning to move quickly again.

Peter Kedge

Maitreya Project Trust International Coordinator