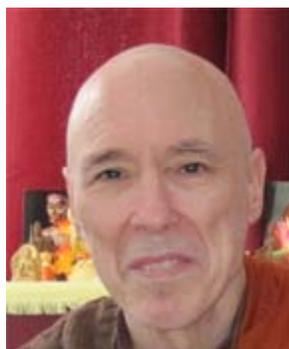




What Kind of World Do We Want?



By Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi - Our lives today are driven by a compulsive busyness that allows us little time for quiet reflection. From the moment we wake up, we face an exacting schedule that exhausts our energies and slowly shreds our hopes. The pressures of work, the strain of relationships, and the fear of loneliness keep us perpetually on edge. Our days are consumed by a relentless stream of tasks, our nights by flights into forgetfulness. Political and economic events, and even the strange vicissitudes of the weather, also chip away at our sense of security, leaving us feeling vulnerable, worried, and exposed.

Buddhism initially appears on our horizon as an alternative to stressful living, and we thus see it primarily as a path to inner peace. This perception is reinforced by popular culture, which pictures the Buddha as a man sitting motionless with crossed legs and closed eyes, seemingly lost to his surroundings. Seldom do we think that Buddhism might offer practical clues to resolving the daunting problems that trouble our planet. The prospect seems inconceivable, and just too remote from our everyday concerns.

Yet, I believe, if we as Buddhists are to adequately address the needs of our age, we will have to take on that job. It won't suffice for us merely to adopt Buddhist teachings as a route to deeper self-fulfillment. A predominantly personal approach to spiritual growth falls short of Buddhism's ethical ideals, and misses half its message. The Buddha taught the Dharma on the basis of a far-reaching vision that pierced the depths of suffering both in its personal *and* collective dimensions. He offered his teaching not only as a method to tame the wayward impulses of the mind but also as a standard for ennobling human beings in all dimensions of their lives, including the social, political, and economic.

Each era presents new challenges in applying the Dharma in ways previously unknown. These challenges are also opportunities—occasions to explore potentials of the teaching that earlier remained in the background. In my view, today we are called to the task of re-envisioning the Dharma with a unique and compelling urgency. Our social and economic order has become a grave danger not only to our psychological resiliency but to the future of civilization itself. With ruthless tenacity, we are wreaking havoc on the habitability of our planet, and have thereby put our own survival at risk.

Under these conditions, Buddhism should offer us a wide perspective and broad platform to ensure that our world remains viable. The word *dharma* is not just a synonym for Buddhism but represents the entire body of values that undergird the moral and spiritual life. To live by Dharma means more than just

seeking personal insight and inner peace. It includes acting steadfastly in ways that maintain the well-being and happiness of the wider webs to which we belong: our family, community, nation, and the world.

Three principles of personal and social integrity are especially imperiled today, principles that underlie three of the Buddhist precepts: refraining from violence, theft, and false speech. As followers of the Dharma, we need to promote them as guidelines for social policy as well as exemplify them in our own conduct. To insist on their social expression is not a matter of playing politics but of acting responsibly as human beings; for if they should be subverted, civilization as we know it will regress and may even collapse.

The first principle is *non-violence* or *non-injury*. Just as a nation or society can flourish only when its members avoid harming one another, so the world community can flourish only when nations abide by international conventions curbing war and aggression. An especially critical aspect of collective non-violence is making a swift transition to renewable sources of energy, a crying need if we are to prevent runaway climate change from ravaging the biosphere and decimating helpless communities on the planet.

The second principle is *social justice*, which stipulates that all people possess inalienable human rights regardless of their race, class, gender, religious beliefs, or sexual orientation. Social justice also entails economic justice, a pillar of societal health that is being aggressively overturned. Economic justice entails equitable incomes and safe work conditions. It entails adequate housing, access to healthy food, affordable medical care, and security in illness and old age.

The third principle is *commitment to truth*. Truth is the guardian of the first two principles, which in troubled times makes it especially vulnerable to attack by those bent on distortion and disinformation. In certain circles it has become an axiom that if one repeats a lie often enough it becomes truth. The limits of this axiom are constantly being pushed, creating ever thicker screens of deception to promote militarism and the assault on social justice.

As an organization intended to manifest the Buddha's great compassion in today's world, Buddhist Global Relief is firmly committed to the principles of non-violence, social justice, and truth. We view them as corollaries of the first, second, and fourth Buddhist precepts, respectively: abstaining from violence, theft, and falsehood. While our actual work is combating poverty and global hunger, we also recognize that mere charity alone is not sufficient. We must also address the conditions that make charity necessary.

This aspect of our mission is well expressed in the memorable words of Martin Luther King in his 1967 speech "Beyond Vietnam": "True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it is not haphazard and superficial. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring." I would add that true compassion is more than just cultivating a beautiful emotion in the heart. Today there are many edifices built on violence, social injustice, and deception that need restructuring. One of the major challenges facing us, as followers of the Buddha's teaching, is to envisage the new structures rooted in wisdom, love, compassion, and moral integrity. Our work may begin with transforming our own attitudes and values, but it cannot stop there. We have to go further and manifest these in action—in deeds that can build a safer, kinder, and more just world.

BGR's Support Brings New Hope to Cambodian Mother

For Chuin Chum Li, a widowed mother of four living in the impoverished Cardamom Mountain region of Cambodia's Pursat province, caring for her family was a challenge in itself. But loans she had taken out to pay for typhoid treatments made her burden almost unbearable. The interest rates were exorbitant, and the terms required that she repay the principal at the end of the loan period—and pledge her home as collateral.

Chuin's employment consisted of hiking a mile to the nearest river to collect marble stones to sell. With the pittance she earned—about \$2.50 a day—and a colossal dose of determination, she managed to feed and clothe her four children and keep them in school. In time, however, the weight of the loans became overwhelming, and the life she had worked so hard to build for her family seemed ready to collapse around them.

Then Chuin was invited to participate in the Integrated Rural Development (IRD) program delivered through a partnership between Buddhist Global Relief and Lotus Outreach International.

The IRD program is designed to address simultaneously the root causes of the region's poverty. These include food insecurity, poor health, and lack of access to education. The program's main focus is to create alternative economic opportunities by providing cash crop seeds and farming tools to help poor families generate income. With BGR's support, the program has, through December 2010, enabled 187 families in Pursat to start growing a variety of cash crops, including mung beans, peanuts, sesame, and corn.

For Chuin, the IRD program has been nothing short of a miracle. With a small, low-interest loan from the community savings group that the program established in her village, she started a mushroom farm that provides enough income for her to manage her loan payments. And the seeds she received through the program have enabled her to start a vegetable garden, so she can provide nutritious food for her family and earn extra income by selling the surplus produce. Chuin's newfound financial stability has also meant that she can spend more time at home with her children and make sure they are studying and making progress in school.

The garden has been an especially gratifying project for Chuin, and not just because of the income it generates. "We eat a lot of food from this garden and now grow a large variety of vegetables, greens, and herbs. And it's all organic!" she says. "We really enjoy the taste of our organic foods grown at home!"

The partnership between BGR and Lotus Outreach International is making a tremendous difference in the lives of Chuin and her four children—and in the lives of hundreds of people in one of Cambodia's most impoverished regions. Lotus Outreach reports that Chuin is so grateful for the program that she made a special trip to thank the organization's program officer. "I missed work today, but I simply had to come and meet you," she told him. "You have saved our lives and given us hope for the future."

BGR Helps Niger in Urgent Food Crisis



The West African nation of Niger is one of the world's poorest countries and is highly vulnerable to droughts and food shortages. In 2010, as a result of particularly low rainfall in 2009, Niger suffered one of the most severe food crises in its history. A survey taken in April 2010 showed that about 7.1 million people—almost half the population—are subject to persistent food insecurity. This has had a drastic impact on the health of the population, with children under five and pregnant and nursing women most at risk.

Helen Keller International (HKI), one of the world's most respected humanitarian organizations, has worked in Niger since 1987 to build sustainable solutions to malnutrition and food shortages. In August 2010, HKI made an urgent appeal to BGR for funding both to respond to the immediate crisis in Niger and to strengthen long-term solutions in the country's most vulnerable regions. BGR responded with a

\$10,000 grant drawn from our emergency funds.



This is the third grant that BGR has made to HKI. Our first grant, awarded in 2009, provided funds for nutritional supplementation in Niger's poverty-stricken Zinder Region, where the acute malnutrition rate is 17 percent. The BGR-sponsored components of the program, implemented in ten villages, provided vitamin A for children under five and postpartum women, and iron, folic acid, and de-worming medicine for pregnant women. A second grant sponsored a series of National

Nutrition Weeks in Mali, another West African country, to train community volunteers to distribute Vitamin A and de-worming medicine to nursing mothers and children under five. The program also raised awareness of the health benefits of breastfeeding, consuming iodized salt, and using insecticide-treated bed nets.

With support from BGR and other partners, HKI responded in a significant way to the 2010 nutritional crisis in Niger. BGR's funds helped HKI to increase the number of health care facilities that offer Community-Based Management of Acute Malnutrition (CMAM) services—an innovative approach to treating malnutrition by building a community's capacity to provide care—and these facilities will continue to assist severely malnourished children and women in the future.

BGR's funds also purchased much-needed medicines and Plumpy'nut—a high-nutrition peanut-based food used in famine relief—at a time when supplies were limited.



In 2011, HKI will continue working to strengthen the capacity of health care facilities in Niger to provide CMAM services, and will also support educational programs designed to promote behavior change that will improve feeding practices and prevent further malnutrition. These efforts should contribute to a decrease in malnutrition in Niger, especially in non-crisis years.



Oxfam Honors BGR Executive Director



In December, Kim Behan, BGR's executive director, received a special honor when Oxfam America, one of the world's leading relief agencies, invited her to become one of its Sisters on the Planet Ambassadors.

The Sisters on the Planet Ambassadors are a group of distinguished women chosen to educate the American public about the unique ways that food production, resource constraints, and climate change impact women. In a letter to Kim, Oxfam America's president, Raymond C. Offenheiser, wrote: "Oxfam America is organizing prominent women leaders across the U.S. to take leadership roles in highlighting the effects of water shortages, increasing volatility in crop yields and food prices, unfair trade policies, and climate change on women. These women are Oxfam America's Sisters on the Planet Ambassadors, and we would like you to join this effort."

As a Sisters on the Planet Ambassador, Kim joins a community that includes members of Congress and leaders in the civic, business, faith-based, and philanthropic sectors who are concerned about the fate of women in today's world. Together with her fellow Ambassadors, she will advocate for poverty alleviation, improvements in the status of women, and responsible climate policies that meet the needs of the most vulnerable people both at home and abroad.

While the remarkable growth and success of BGR have been due to the efforts of our entire team, it has been above all Kim's unwavering commitment to our mission that has spearheaded our development. The honor conferred on her by Oxfam is a fitting recognition of the important role she is playing in putting compassion into action on behalf of the world's poor, especially girls and women.

BGR Celebrates International Women's Day

On March 8, 2011, Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi and BGR executive director Kim Behan represented BGR at Oxfam America's celebration of the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day, in Berkeley, California. The goals of the celebration were to raise public awareness of poverty and hunger, and to celebrate the vital role that women play in feeding the world and acting as agents of change. The

Berkeley gathering was one of more than 100 events held around the country to mark the anniversary, and featured a reception, film screening, and panel discussion with local activists, food experts, and leaders in business and government.

Bhante and Kim became involved in the event in December, when Liz Carty, a fellow member of the Task Force of the Global Initiative for Faith, Health, and Development and the Strategic Alliances Manager at Oxfam America, invited BGR to work with Oxfam to raise awareness of the 2011 International Women's Day celebration. BGR was among the first organizations in the nation to declare its support for the event. Recognizing that the celebration's goals were deeply in harmony with BGR's mission, Bhante and Kim not only attended the Berkeley gathering but also directed BGR's collaboration with Oxfam on an email campaign to bring attention to the event and to encourage other organizations to participate.

Save the Date – 2011 BGR Walk for Hunger Relief

Saturday, September 10, 2011, is the date for BGR's second annual Walk for Hunger Relief. Last year's first-ever walk was held at the scenic South Mountain Reservation in South Orange, New Jersey, and raised more than \$22,000 for BGR's projects. Plans are well under way for another successful event this year, and we hope you will be able to join us or perhaps organize a fundraising walk in your own community. So mark your calendars and stay tuned. We will be announcing the location and other important information about the 2011 walk soon.

Watch Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi's Lecture at Google

Last autumn, Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, Kim Behan, and Sylvie Sun visited a number of organizations in the San Francisco Bay Area to foster understanding of the work of BGR. Bhante offered teachings at the Berkeley Buddhist Monastery, Spirit Rock Meditation Center, and other locations, including Google headquarters, in Mountain View. You can watch his lecture at Google, entitled "It Takes Two to Tango: The Human Future and the Future of Buddhism," on You Tube by clicking [here](#)

How You Can Help

Your donation will help us to continue our work providing relief to people afflicted by poverty and hunger in poor communities in southern and central Asia, Africa, Haiti, and the United States. We welcome both one-time and monthly donations. To donate, please click [here](#).

And if you would like to lend a hand to BGR by becoming a virtual volunteer, we would love to hear from you. Please contact us at info@buddhistglobalrelief.org to learn about volunteer opportunities.

Thank you for your support for BGR.