



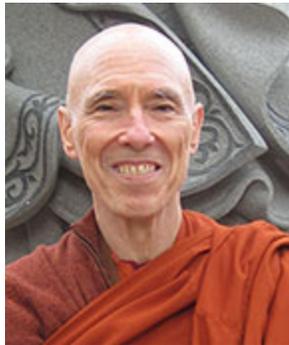
buddhist global relief



helping hands newsletter

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Let's Not Abandon the Poor and Hungry



By Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi - This past spring, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a federal budget that should send shivers down the spines of advocates for food justice. The budget, crafted by Wisconsin congressman Paul Ryan, now the Republican candidate for vice-president, is offered as “a path to prosperity,” but non-partisan economists have described it as “a path to ruin.” While the budget’s proponents say their aim is to get the federal deficit under control, on ethical grounds the budget gives grounds for deep concern.

Commentators have pointed out the impact this budget will have on poor sections of our population. New York Times columnist [Paul Krugman](#) describes it as “simultaneously ridiculous and heartless.” According to the [Center for Budget and Policy Priorities](#), the budget would gain 62% of its savings by slashing programs that benefit low-income groups. The budget would take big bites out of SNAP, the food stamps program that helps to alleviate hunger in America. The budget cuts funding for food stamps by \$133.5 billion over the next ten years, more than 17%. At a stroke, this could knock eight to ten million people off the program, pushing them over the cliff into malnutrition or even starvation.

Paul Ryan says his economic vision is inspired by his Catholic faith, but the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops thinks otherwise. In a letter to the House [the bishops wrote](#) that “deficit reduction and fiscal responsibility efforts must protect and not undermine the needs of poor and vulnerable people. The proposed cuts to programs in the budget reconciliation fail this basic moral test.” Though Buddhism does not have a central council like the Conference of Bishops, Buddhists of conscience should deplore a budget that delivers such hard blows to hungry children, single mothers, the unemployed, and those with low-paying jobs.

The deficit hawks who rally behind the House budget insist that the shortfall in government spending on food aid could be compensated for by religious institutions offering more in charity to the hungry. But the Christian advocacy group Bread for the World estimates that to replace the funding withdrawn from SNAP, every synagogue, church, mosque, and temple in the country [would have to raise an additional \\$50,000 every year](#) over the next ten years. This would have a devastating impact on their efforts to address increasing need.

Fortunately the proposed budget has not yet been approved by the Senate, but in the near future we can expect sustained efforts to ram it through. The big argument in favor of cutting spending on social services is the need to reduce the deficit. However, while deficit reduction is certainly critical, programs that help the poor should be spared as a matter of moral principle; for many people these programs are almost literally a matter of life and death. Contrary to the popular myth of the Cadillac-driving “welfare queen,” those who depend on social services usually work hard, often for long hours five or six days a week. The crux of the problem is simply that many jobs don’t pay subsistence wages.

In the final analysis, the debate over how we should reduce the national deficit—whether by cutting social safety nets or by increasing revenues and shrinking defense spending—boils down to the bigger question of the kind of society we want to create. Our answer to this question in turn rests on two very different assumptions about human nature and the means to establish the good society.

In one vision, human beings are essentially self-interested agents driven by a narrow concern for their own well-being. The key to social progress is untrammelled competition in the global free market. When the free market operates without constraint, the talented will flourish and their prosperity will trickle down to those at the bottom. In this way, a free market also conduces to the moral good.

In the other vision, human beings are essentially social creatures who thrive best in community. Competition may be a spur to economic growth and technological innovation, but such values as compassion and cooperation, which express our essential interconnectedness, should take precedence. Society flourishes best when we all flourish together, and often this is only possible when government actively intervenes to safeguard the vulnerable from the vagaries of an unregulated market.

Between these two visions, it's the second that corresponds with Buddhist values and a Buddhist perspective on the role of the state, as seen in the ideal figure of the "wheel-turning king," who protects all in his realm, ensuring that all citizens receive the basic material requisites of life. Transposed to a modern democracy, this task would naturally fall on the elected government, which is thus obliged to protect the vulnerable and alleviate poverty.

Of course, the final solution to the problem of poverty does not lie in programs that distribute provisions to the poor, but in good jobs that pay adequate compensation, along with guarantees that even the most menial types of work pay a truly living wage. The key to good jobs is opportunity, and in today's world the doors of opportunity are opened by education. It thus falls to the government—whether at the federal or state level—to improve the standards of public education and guarantee that all children have access to good schools with rigorous programs and capable teachers. But for such social transformation to be possible, leaders with courage, vision, and conviction must step forth to fearlessly promote wise and compassionate policies. This above all is the crying need of our time.

(This essay is a condensed version of a longer blog entry entitled "Bussing for a More Just Budget," posted September 13th, at <http://buddhistglobalrelief.wordpress.com/>.)

BGR's Walks to Feed the Hungry 2012

By David Liu - BGR's Walk to Feed the Hungry events are fast approaching, and we are blessed to have ten official walks planned for this year. These include our first ever international walk, which will take place in Yorkshire, United Kingdom, on September 29th. The Walk to Feed the Hungry is our main fundraising event of the year, and our ability to fulfill and expand our programs depends on the success of the walks. In addition to the official walks, it has been heartwarming to see the outpouring of support from those who want to hold other kinds of events to support our work.



Our beneficiaries in Asia have also been holding walks to express their gratitude for the help that BGR has given them. In Nagpur, India, on September 16th, social workers from the [Bodhicitta Foundation](#), together with slum women and children who have benefited from our grants, walked in solidarity with BGR's Walk Campaign and our anti-hunger and poverty projects around the world. In the words of Bodhicitta's founder, the Australian nun, Ayya Yeshe: "The people who are walking directly know the effects of poverty and hunger: reduced strength and learning ability, less chance for a full and meaningful human life, obstacles

to reaching their full potential."

In Cambodia, BGR has sponsored [Lotus Outreach's](#) Girls Access To Education program over the past three years. In a gesture of gratitude, beneficiaries of the program will be walking on October 4th to show their appreciation to BGR. According to **Erika Keaveney**, Executive Director of Lotus Outreach: "Nearly 200 impoverished Cambodian men, women, and children will gather for a walk against hunger in Banteay Meanchey. Walkers will include thirty-six vulnerable young girls who have been able to continue in school because their families have been receiving BGR-supported food relief since 2009. This aid provides a critical lifeline to some of the most impoverished families on the planet."



Your donations do make a difference! Some of these children have lost one or both parents and have been living in tents and other temporary structures. For some, the meals provided with BGR funding are their only meal of the day.

For more detailed information about our upcoming walks, please visit our website at: <http://www.buddhistglobalrelief.org/>

BGR Supports Glide's Food & Sustainable Nutrition Program



By Anna Hasemann - BGR's mission statement is clear: "we combat hunger." While we often associate hunger with far-away, exotic countries, it is not only a reality in developing countries but increasingly also a domestic issue. For this reason, BGR is now partnering with the San Francisco-based organization Glide, which has been providing homeless and low-income residents with a wide range of support such as housing assistance, health care provision, and youth engagement for over 40 years. Founded in 1969 by a handful of community volunteers offering free potluck dinners, Glide today serves over 6,593 individuals in addition to providing 948,878 free meals yearly. In recent years, [Glide's Free Meals](#) program has focused on alleviating hunger and increasing sustainable nutrition.

BGR is supporting this effort by providing Glide's Food and Sustainable Nutrition program with a one-year grant. The aim of this program is to achieve self-sufficiency and break the cycle of poverty in San Francisco's District 6, where 40% of the city's homeless population live as well as the second highest rate of children living in SROs. In line with the BGR principles of focusing simultaneously on emergency food aid and sustainable food security, the Food and Sustainable Nutrition program has both short-term and long-term strategies, alleviating immediate hunger while also creating longer term self-sufficiency for individuals,



families, and their children. In practical terms this means providing three free, nutritious meals per day, 364 days per year, under the supervision of a registered dietician; providing daily meals and snacks to participants of the Childcare and Afterschool Summer Program; and increasing the community's knowledge of and sustainable access to healthy food. Building on the already established Daily Free Meals Program and the Family, Youth and Childcare Center, activities on offer will be cooking and nutrition workshops, farmer's market field trips, and Graze the Roof Garden Education Classes.

Through innovative educational components like the Graze the Roof Education Program, Glide is able to pursue a holistic approach that makes a real long-term difference to ending the marginalization of underprivileged people. Graze the Roof Garden is comprised of weekly classes for youth and adult community members during which participants are actively engaged in all aspects of gardening from seed planting to care, harvest, and consumption. They are also given the opportunity to interact regularly with nature and learn about food systems, ecology, and community and personal health.

By providing community members with knowledge of and access



to nutrition, Glide is empowering the community to make positive choices for themselves and their families and addressing the root of poverty, which is the lack of knowledge and resources to live a healthy life. During this process people begin to learn that, as Glide Board Member Lars Dalgaard puts it, “there’s magic in every person.” As a result, one of the most positive outcomes of Glide’s work has been the increased involvement and engagement of parents and families in their volunteer programs. This effect is created by Glide’s approach to helping: “when someone falls in line for food, we give them love” (James, Glide Staff Member).

BGR Supports City Harvest's Healthy Neighborhoods Initiative



By Jessie Benjamin - BGR is partnering for the first time with City Harvest’s Healthy Neighborhood Initiative with a focus on the South Bronx and Washington Heights neighborhoods in New York City. This partnership shares the mission of addressing the debilitating impacts of hunger and malnutrition. The South Bronx has particularly stunning statistics with a poverty rate of 39%; where 70% of adults are overweight or obese and 13% are diabetic. When individuals and families with limited resources are unable to find sustenance and where healthy food choices are locally unavailable, conditions converge to create what is known

as the “Obesity - Hunger Paradox.” Readily available food is calorie abundant and nutritionally deficient. This story is not unique to New York City but is prevalent throughout low income neighborhoods in this country.

The strategy of Healthy Neighborhoods is to blend short-term emergency intervention with a patient long-term approach that addresses education and behavioral change. Working with local food vendors to offer wholesome, nutritious, and affordable food to their communities is a key strategy. Displays at corner stores are enhanced by featuring images of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Fresh food is rescued and provided at no cost to soup kitchens and pantries. Last year 29 million pounds of food was delivered to 600 community feeding programs. Free produce is offered at farmers markets in targeted neighborhoods as part of the Mobile Market initiative. These markets have become a place of community gatherings where cooking demonstrations are held and local organizations such as the American Diabetes Association provide bilingual workshops on prevention. The Mobile Market has shown tangible results. Participants are eating and cooking healthy foods at home. They feel healthier. Young and old alike are making connections, as only sharing food can, through wholesome meals and shared recipes.



A series of courses is offered throughout communities within New York City that provides practical, real world steps for achieving a healthy diet. Nutrition education is offered to children, families, and seniors to enable them to make positive dietary changes. Partnerships with local residents and organizations are made and Community Food Assessments are conducted that identify eating and shopping habits, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the local food markets. As a means of sustaining a broad base of

support for communities throughout New York City, Healthy Neighborhoods works with community-based partners to ensure their ability to provide and operate at a maximum efficiency.



For three successive years, City Harvest has received a four star rating from Charity Navigator, as well as the silver prize of Nonprofit Excellence Awards from the New York Times.

BGR will provide City Harvest's Healthy Neighborhoods \$10,000 to support the distribution of food to Mobile Markets. This partnership is a marriage of missions that will not only alleviate suffering caused by hunger and malnutrition but it will foster a rediscovery of the simple pleasures found in preparing and eating fresh and wholesome food.

Benefit Jazz Concert for BGR

In anticipation of our upcoming New York Walk to Feed the Hungry, jazz musician and BGR supporter Dan Blake organized a benefit concert to raise funds for BGR. The concert was held on the evening of September 12th, at St. Ann and the Holy Trinity Church in Brooklyn Heights. For all who attended, the evening provided a rich feast of outstanding music at the cutting edge of contemporary jazz.



The concert featured saxophonist-composer Dan Blake, bassist-vocalist-composer Esperanza Spalding, pianist Leo Genovese, percussionist Richie Barshay, and singer-songwriter Margaret Glaspy. The program began with a set of songs sung beautifully and with deep feeling by **Margaret Glaspy**, who accompanied herself on guitar. Following the song set, the jazz ensemble led by Dan Blake took the stage for a set that included both original compositions and established pieces. The quartet featured **Esperanza Spalding**, a rising jazz star and recording artist who won the Grammy Award for Best New Artist at the 53rd Grammy Awards in 2011, the first jazz musician ever to win this award. **Dan Blake**, who played both soprano and tenor sax, has himself emerged as a leading figure in New York's creative music scene, with several records to his credit and a listing among the best upcoming jazz musicians in 2011.

The audience included not only jazz fans from the general public but esteemed monastics, among them our chair, Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, who opened the evening with brief remarks about the work of BGR. Monks and nuns from Chuang Yen Monastery, led by the abbot, Ven. Sak Dhammadiya, also attended. Ven. Bodhi, who had aspired to become a jazz musician during his last year of high school, described the music as "at times emotionally raw, at times playful, yet always joyful, bold, and innovative."





All proceeds of the concert will go toward BGR grants to partner organization around the globe that give vital food aid and promote greater food productivity. One organization receiving such support is the Brooklyn-based charity [Added Value](#), which is working to develop a more sustainable and just urban food system in the Red Hook district of Brooklyn.

We thank everyone who contributed to the success of this concert, including the BGR team members and volunteers who ensured that the event took place without a hitch. Special thanks are due to the priest-in-charge of St. Ann and the Holy Trinity Church, Rev. John Denaro, who kindly made the church available to BGR and honored us with some words of appreciation at the opening of the concert.

How You Can Help

Interested in volunteering for BGR? Joining our team offers an amazing opportunity to put compassion into action and help create a better world. Being an all-volunteer organization, we need qualified help. You'll find a list of [volunteer opportunities](#) on our website. Positions are open for people who can responsibly and consistently manage routine tasks like picking up and distributing printed materials, as well as skilled graphic design specialists, writers, and others. Some volunteers need to be located in a particular place, but most can work from home, wherever that may be.

As always, donations to BGR are welcome. You can donate by PayPal or credit card on the website, on Facebook, or by check to:

Buddhist Global Relief
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Thank you for your help!