



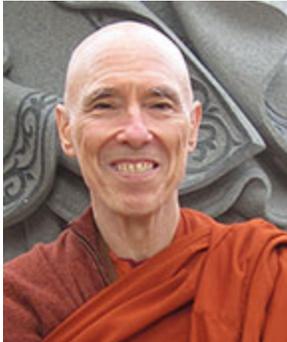
buddhist global relief



helping hands newsletter

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Igniting a Revolution of Values



By Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi - We started holding our “Walks to Feed the Hungry” three years ago, and over the years the walks have expanded in number: from a single walk in 2010 to three in 2011 to twelve this year, including walks by our beneficiaries in Cambodia and India. This is an extremely encouraging development, which suggests that our work has struck a chord within the Buddhist community.

To my mind, the driving spirit behind our walks was eloquently expressed decades ago by Dr. Martin Luther King in his speech, “A Time to Break Silence”:

A genuine revolution of values means in the final analysis that our loyalties must become universal rather than sectional. Every nation must now develop an overriding loyalty to humanity as a whole in order to preserve the best in their individual societies. This call for a world-wide fellowship that lifts neighborly concern beyond one's tribe, race, class and nation is in reality a call for an all-embracing and unconditional love for all human beings. This is now an absolute necessity for the survival of humanity.

This speech was given by Dr. King on April 4, 1967, at Riverside Church in New York. As Dr. King knew well, walking can be more than a physical act. It can be a statement of conscience, a living expression of one's deepest moral convictions. In fact, when Dr. King was assassinated in Memphis exactly a year after giving this speech, he was there to lead a walk in support of striking sanitation workers.

When we come together to walk on behalf of the hungry, we are manifesting that “all-embracing and unconditional love for all human beings” that Dr. King saw as the key to human survival. We're dedicating a day of our own lives to make a difference in the lives of others. We're walking out of concern for people far and wide, from the hamlets of Vietnam to the villages of Kenya; from the tent towns of Haiti to the streets of New York and San Francisco.

Despite the distances that separate us, we're each connected to everyone on this planet by a network of invisible links. Our lands of origin might be different, our skins might be of different shades, we might speak different languages, but what unites us is far greater and more important than what distinguishes us. Not only are our bodies all supported by a framework of bones and sustained by red blood, but we're connected with one another, and with everyone else on the planet, at a still deeper level than the physical. We are joined at the core of our being, joined by the very nature of consciousness.

To be conscious is to be a fragment of the universe reflecting the whole from a particular perspective. As conscious beings we reflect the sky, the mountains, the oceans, the rivers, and the earth. We reflect the stardust from which our bodies are made. Most crucially, we also reflect ourselves, our inner depths, which gives us an immediate resonance with others. Through our consciousness of ourselves we recognize the consciousness of others, and we thereby acquire the potential to understand others and to share their feelings. Just that is the meaning of empathy: the capacity to feel the suffering of others as our own suffering, to recognize their desire for happiness as our own desire.

It isn't enough, however, just to possess this capacity. This capacity is something that must be developed, and that requires intentional effort. As we make the effort, our love expands, our compassion grows bigger, our commitment to the good of others grows firmer, ultimately embracing all living beings in all realms and all world systems. But as human beings, we've got to start with those who are closest at hand, with other human beings, who are too often consigned to a fate on earth as miserable as any depicted in hell.

Compassion arises from a shift in our sense of identity. Buddhism teaches that the idea of a separate substantial self, the private "I," is a delusion, the fundamental delusion around which the unawakened life revolves. When we pierce through this delusion, our sense of identity expands, penetrating and embracing everyone. From this perspective, I am not just one finite individual, the monk called "Bhikkhu Bodhi." I am also the girl in Cambodia being compelled by her family to drop out of school in order to work in the field or factory. I am the boy in Haiti whose father perished in the earthquake, who now waits in line to receive a single nutritious meal a day. I am the mother in Niger who carries her child across sand dunes in a desperate quest for food. And I am the sales clerk in Seattle, recently laid off, who now stands at the roadside with a sign that reads "homeless and hungry."

When we walk a few miles on one of BGR's "Walks to Feed the Hungry," we are walking for the sake of these people. And we are walking for millions of others who share their plight. We are showing that our own well-being isn't enough, that our own well-being can never be enough. It can never be enough because the polarity of "us" and "others" is a false opposition. We're all in this together, and therefore compassion tells us that as long as some among us suffer, we've got to act to remove their suffering.

By walking together we're expressing this sense of universal compassion, but we're also doing something else. We're affirming a principle of justice that is intrinsically valid regardless of our personal opinions. We're paying homage to an invisible moral law that makes an objective claim on our conscience, telling us what is right and what is wrong and urging us to do what is right and necessary. This principle of justice is enunciated in the Declaration of Independence. It's enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that everyone has the right to adequate food, clothing, housing, medical care, and essential social services.

The reason we have these rights is simply that we're human beings, and in this respect everyone is equal. It doesn't matter whether you have a million dollars in the bank or just a few bucks in your pocket. It doesn't matter whether you live in a mansion off Park Avenue or in a hut in Kenya. It doesn't matter whether you read the Bible, the Quran, the Gita, or the Dhammapada. Whether you're a man or a woman, black, brown, red, or white: these rights are equally yours. And when we walk together we affirm these rights.

Yet affirming these rights is just a stepping stone toward their realization, and that is where we fall short. That's where our governments and the global community have fallen short. For these rights are constantly being pushed to the side, constantly being trampled upon by a social, economic, and political system that confers immense benefits on a few and deprives too many of the building blocks of a decent

life. Close to a billion people today are shadowed by hunger. Every year, millions die from malnutrition and hunger-related illnesses, most of them women and children. Even in this country, the richest on earth, one out of seven people depends on food stamps, and six million folks have no other income than food stamps.

These numbers aren't mere statistics. Behind the numbers are real people. Behind the numbers are children with big dreams and wasted bodies. Behind the numbers are mothers who wonder how they will feed their kids from one day to the next. Behind the numbers are farmers who watch their crops wither beneath a blazing sun, or perish beneath relentless rain. Behind the numbers are Somalian refugees huddled in overcrowded camps and unemployed workers lining up in food pantries that are running short of food.

Let's not kid ourselves. There is no real shortage of food in the world. There is no shortage of funds to provide the hungry with food. There is no shortage of land to grow more food. It wouldn't take much to wipe out global hunger—perhaps fifty or sixty billion dollars would suffice. That might seem like a lot, but really, it's just a fraction of what we spend annually on defense. Our government has hundreds of billions of dollars to spend on weapons, on instruments of death, but when food and healthcare are needed we're suddenly short of cash. Yet wiping out hunger would wipe out fear, wipe out hatred, wipe out the causes of war, wipe out the need for lavish spending on defense. So why aren't we doing this? We aren't doing it because we're lacking the will, the heart, the compassion to do it. We aren't doing it because we aren't heeding the voice of justice bidding us use our resources as they should be used, to ensure that no one goes hungry, to ensure that we all flourish together.

As I see it, the challenge facing humanity in the present century is precisely to see that we all flourish together, that we can all enjoy a world of peace, harmony, and simple human decency. By walking, we're taking steps to make this vision a reality. By walking, we're working to change the system. By walking, we're becoming revolutionaries, helping to ignite a revolution that assigns primary value to compassion and love and justice for all. By walking, we're using our feet to say, "Hey, this isn't the way the world should work. Surely, we can do better than that. Surely, we can change this crazy system to make the world work for everyone."

(This is an edited version of Ven. Bodhi's talk at the New York and Escondido Walks.)

Reflections on Walk to Feed the Hungry 2012

Edited by David Liu - BGR's Walk to Feed the Hungry is our primary fundraising event of the year. The walk not only enables BGR to sponsor its projects for the next fiscal year, but also provides support to local organizations engaged in the fight against hunger. This year, the third year of the campaign, walks took place in twelve locations: nine in the U.S., and one each in India, Cambodia, and the United Kingdom. Below are brief reports on some of the walks. We gratefully thank each and every supporter, organizer, and volunteer for putting compassion into action on behalf of vulnerable people around the world.

Nagpur, India, by Ven. Ayya Yeshe, Founder of the Bodhicitta Foundation



Social workers from the Bodhicitta Foundation, together with slum women and children who benefit from BGR's grants, walked in solidarity with BGR's anti-hunger and anti-poverty projects around the world. These walkers directly know the effects of poverty and hunger: reduced strength and learning ability, less chance for a full and meaningful human life, and obstacles to reaching their full potential. For them, the walk therefore has a highly personal meaning.

Banteay Meanchey, Cambodia, by Erika Keaveney, Executive Director, Lotus Outreach

In Cambodia, nearly 200 impoverished Cambodian men, women, and children in Banteay Meanchey province walked to show their appreciation to BGR. Walkers included thirty-six vulnerable girls who have been able to continue in school because their families have been receiving BGR-supported food relief since 2009 through Lotus Outreach's Girls Access to Education (GATE) program. This aid provides a critical lifeline to some of the most impoverished families on the planet.



Yorkshire, UK, by Richard Dillon



After a summer of torrential rain, the UK Walk to Feed the Hungry was blessed by sunshine and blue skies. About twenty-five walkers enjoyed a nine-mile walk, which began on the steps of the Brontë Parsonage Museum in Haworth, crossed the Pennine moorland featured in Wuthering Heights, and finished in the old textile town of Hebden Bridge. All who participated had an enjoyable day and plan to make this an annual event and to lead other BGR walks across the United Kingdom.

Seattle, WA, USA, by Jeff Carl

Approximately forty-five people turned out for this first Seattle walk event, led by Venerable Santidhammo from Wat Atammayarama, Rev. Genko Kathy Blackman from Dai Bai Cho Bo Zen Ji, and Rev. Shozan Mark Joslyn from Entsuji on Bainbridge Island. A large contingent from the Nalanda West Sangha in Seattle and many other supportive walkers participated. The route was a three-mile loop through Capital Hill. Several people joined the walk as it proceeded, and others brought food offerings. The event ended with stories and thoughts on Buddhist practice before the registration tables and signs were taken down and put away until 2013.



Ann Arbor, MI, USA, by Maureen Bodenbach



This year's Michigan Walk to Feed the Hungry was truly a success, with seventy-five people from more than ten Buddhist communities across Michigan participating. Bhante Sankiccha,

Bhante Soma, and Bhante Jhanananda from Great Lakes Buddhist Vihara, Haju Sunim from the Ann Arbor Zen Temple, and Rev. Bob Brown from Sokukoji Buddhist Community in Battle Creek provided inspiring Dharma talks and led us through the rain with kindness and compassion. Deepali Stark from Food Gatherers provided insight on the issue of hunger and hunger relief right here in Michigan. We all felt grateful for the opportunity to come together to make an incalculable difference in the lives of others, a powerful gift to ourselves and to the world. And despite bad weather, the walk raised a substantial sum!

San Francisco, CA, USA, by Ajahn Guna

On a stunningly beautiful day in San Francisco about 150 people joined the four-mile BGR pilgrimage. We gathered in Chinatown and were assisted by the San Francisco Police Department, which did an excellent job directing traffic and protecting the walkers. Each temple that received us graciously offered



refreshments and inspiration. Starting at Norras Temple in Chinatown, we passed the famous Grace Cathedral, San Bao Temple, the Buddhist Church of SF, the Soto Zen Buddhism International Center, and the Vietnamese Buddhist Association, ending at the San Francisco Zen Center. Many young people from the Dharma Realm Buddhist Association brought their energy and faith to the event. Everyone enjoyed the day and can't wait for next year!

San Jose-Mountain View, CA, USA, by Ajahn Guna



About 200 people gathered in San Jose for a twelve-mile Walk to Feed the Hungry. We were lucky that the clouds protected us from the bright California sun and gave us perfect walking conditions. We started at the site of Dharma Punx, passed on to San Jose Insight and Floating Zendo, and paused for refreshments at the Buddhi Vihara in Santa Clara, where nuns and monks chanted blessings for all the walkers. We next stopped at the Sunnyvale Chung Tai Zen

Center, where the Sangha graciously provided all the participants a delicious vegetarian lunch and sustained our spirits with Dharma talks. Ending at the Sylvan Park in Mountain View, we shared merit and reaffirmed our intention to help the hungry people of this world.

Santa Monica, CA, USA, by Tom Moritz

Over sixty people, including one young "walker" who had not yet started to walk, participated in the first Southern California Walk to Feed the Hungry. As we prepared to set out, it began to drizzle, but spirits among the monastic and lay participants were high. Bhante Piyanda of the Dharmavijaya Buddhist Vihara offered a blessing and,



together with BGR Chairperson, Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, carried the banner at the front of the procession. We walked west to the "Against the Stream" Santa Monica Meditation Center, where a group of volunteers served us a delicious lunch. This was followed by a short meditation, a talk on BGR by Bhikkhu Bodhi, and chanting of the Metta Sutta. We look forward to an even bigger event next year!

Escondido, CA, USA, by Ajahn Guna



About fifty monks and nuns from all Buddhist traditions, participants in the annual Western Buddhist Monastic Gathering at Deer Park Monastery, came out from their retreat to walk the streets of Escondido in their various colored robes. We started in the beautiful Grape Day Park, walked through downtown, and ended back in Grape Day Park for lunch and talks. Groups of school children on an outing caught their first glimpse of the Buddhist Sangha. Deer Park Monastery offered all the participants a delicious and nutritious vegetarian lunch, and many volunteers contributed to the success of

the event. Everyone was inspired to walk again at next year's Monastic Gathering, and perhaps in their own home bases!

New York, NY USA, by Deena Scherer

The annual Buddhist Global Relief walk to end hunger was held in New York on October 13, 2012. The day was perfect for walking. There were over 126 registrants joining us on our 3.5 mile walk along Riverside Park. The air was filled with compassion and dedication. The walk opened and closed with blessings from Bhikkhu Bodhi and a multitude of other local monastics. Nuns from Dharma Drum Mountain kicked things off with a moving meditation to put us all in the right frame of mind. There was an exquisite lunch supplied by a group of devoted volunteers, and many marvelous "door prizes" we're offered. However the biggest winners were the hungry people around the world and the USA supported by BGR.



Chicago, IL, USA, by George Clapp



BGR held its first annual Walk to Feed the Hungry on Saturday, Oct 13, in Grant Park on the lakefront near downtown Chicago. There was a cold, hard rain that morning, and the twelve people who braved the weather and gathered at the park all agreed that the weather was too inclement to proceed. However, some of the group gathered at a

nearby coffee shop afterwards and shared hot beverages and warm conversations. Beth Kanji Goldring, an American Zen nun in the Japanese Rinzai tradition, was a very welcome member of the group. In 2001, Beth had founded the Cambodian "Brahmavihara AIDS Project," which is a Buddhist program working with Cambodian AIDS patients who were too poor to access traditional resources. Everyone expressed their appreciation for the walk and anticipation for the next walk in the fall of 2013.

Economic Improvement of the Deoghar District

By Jennifer Russ - Imagine abject poverty. Imagine constant hunger. Imagine toiling on a farm that provides less than six months of food for your family. Imagine being forced to leave your home. For the tribal farmers of the Deoghar district of Jharkland, India, these are the unfortunate realities with which they constantly have to contend.

Now, even worse: imagine being a woman.

In the Deoghar district, almost 88% of tribal women are moderately to severely malnourished, and nearly 50% are illiterate. Tribal women are not permitted to inherit property. Elderly and deserted women are humiliated or even tortured.

Life as a tribal farmer in the Deoghar district is difficult; life as a tribal woman in the Deoghar district is brutal.

The Badlao Foundation wants to help. With the support of Buddhist Global Relief, the Badlao Foundation seeks to increase the living standard of marginalized tribal farmers in the Deoghar district by training them to farm sustainably and manage their money effectively. Crucial to this plan is the education and empowerment of tribal women so that they may become economically stable and financially independent.

When Badlao Foundation staff members began conducting meetings with residents of the Deoghar district, they found the local farmers reluctant to take part in this program. After some explanation,





however, farmers began to realize that Badlao's ideas made sense, that they could improve their economic situations and benefit their families. After field visits to inspect the land for fertility and assess local resources, Badlao staff selected 149 beneficiaries in the villages of Karanpura, Madanpur, Shyampur, Dhakodih, and Sarpatta Kolpara and set the project in motion. They started by selecting land and preparing it for cultivation according to the advice of several experts.

In addition to the Farmer's Clubs that will support the farmers with technical issues, plants, irrigation, and fencing, Badlao established seven Mahila Sabhas, women's organizations that allow the village women to gather, build savings accounts for their families, and learn about government schemes, facilities, rights, and entitlements. They will also be able to take loans from the bank in order to invest in agricultural opportunities, which will improve their business skills and empower them economically.

There is still much work to be done. Goals over the next six months include the training of the farmers, the delivery of organic manure, saplings, seeds, and fencing to the Farmer's Club, a visit from a technical expert, and the formulation of a water resource conservation plan. In addition, awareness sessions will take place at the Farmer's Clubs and Mahila Sabhas on tribal rights, gender equality, health, and education.

When women are educated and respected enough to make decisions for their families, everyone around them benefits. Through cooperation, mobilization, and education, the tribal farmers of the Deoghar district will enjoy more bountiful crops, increase their economic stability, and reap the rewards of an education for many years to come.



Girls' Access to Education (GATE) Project



By Benjamin Charlton - One of the cruelest legacies of Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge regime (1975–79) was a murderous “brain drain” that killed nearly all Cambodia's professionals and educated people, leaving few alive with the knowledge and skills needed to rebuild a ruined country. Today only one in twenty-five Cambodian workers has any education beyond secondary school. Women are the worse off: two of every five girls above age 15 have never attended school at all.

The problem is not necessarily that families overlook the benefits of education: many simply struggle to meet their day-to-day needs and have no option but to take their daughters out of school and put them to work. Girls withdrawn from school lack employable skills, leaving them few alternatives to the sex trade.

Giving girls access to education attacks a weak link in the cycle of poverty. The statistics are unequivocal: children of school-educated women are healthier, better educated, and twice as likely to live to see their fifth birthday. Each extra year of school boosts a girl's future wages by 10%–25%—and when women earn extra income they invest 90% of it in their families, compared to just 30%–40% for men. This makes girls' education the “Trojan horse” in the war against poverty, benefiting not only young women themselves but also countless women and men of future generations.

Education liberates: women with an education are better equipped to resist or escape all-too-prevalent abuse, and to demand a greater say in decisions that affect them, both in politics and within the home. Education arms impoverished young women to fight off attempts to exploit their desperation and trick or coerce them into the sex trade and other dangerous and illegal work.

Buddhist Global Relief partners with Lotus Outreach in a program known as “GATE,” Girls Access To Education. With the help of local organizations, Lotus Outreach identifies those girls most in danger of abuse and exploitation, as well as those who are already victims. It then supports their education by ensuring that they and their families have enough to eat while they study. The BGR grant supplies fifty impoverished families with the rice they need each month on the condition that their daughters attend school.

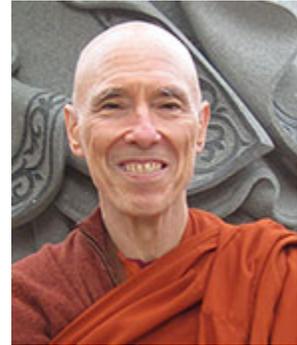


Despite their unpromising start in life, the girls receiving these “rice scholarships” have higher attendance rates than the national average. They are less likely to drop out or repeat grades and more likely to go on to secondary school. Some have even managed, against heavy odds, to enter university. Buddhist Global Relief has helped 58 of these young women remain at university by ensuring they have enough to eat and do not face constant pressure to drop out and find work. This support helps women born into abject poverty to join the exclusive 1% of Cambodia's women who are graduates, unlocking their talents to help their shattered nation recover.

Recent Events

During his stay in Berkeley in early November, BGR chairperson Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi participated in a panel discussion with two other distinguished Buddhist activists: Joanna Macy and Ven. Paññavati Karuna. Joanna Macy is virtually the “grandmother” of Engaged Buddhism—an eco-philosopher, activist, and scholar of Buddhism, general systems theory, and deep ecology. Ven. Paññavati Karuna, an ordained bhikkhuni (nun), has worked with homeless youth and for women’s rights around the world and has recently been working with Dalit (“untouchable”) communities in India. The panel discussion, organized and filmed by the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, can be viewed here:

<http://tinyurl.com/cnvr2w4>



On the same trip to California, Ven. Bodhi also spoke about the work of BGR at Dharma Vijaya Vihara in Los Angeles, Deer Park Monastery in Escondido, Against the Stream Meditation Center in Santa Monica, University of the West in Rosemead, Karuna Buddhist Vihara in Millbrae, and Spirit Rock Meditation Center.

How You Can Help

Interested in volunteering for BGR? By joining our team you will meet others who share your values and are working to put compassion into action and help create a better world. You’ll find a list of [volunteer opportunities](#) on our website. Open positions will be listed, together with the skills needed and any particular requirements for each position. Some volunteers need to be located in a particular place, but most can work from home, wherever that may be. Please contact us at <mailto:info@buddhistglobalrelief.org> for further information.

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

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Thank you for your help!