



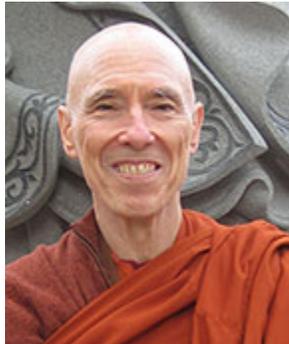
buddhist global relief



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## The Values That Guide Us



**By Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi** - The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP, also known as “food stamps,” comes up for renewal every five years as part of the federal farm bill. Normally, its passage is a routine matter that engenders little debate. Last week, however, the House version of the bill went down in defeat. This was a good thing, for the bill would have slashed funding for SNAP by \$20.5 billion over the next ten years, dealing a harsh blow to the 47 million Americans that depend on food stamps. But the reason it went down in defeat is not so good. It failed because a clique of Republicans voted against it, convinced the cuts were not steep enough.

Decisions about spending on food stamps and other measures to alleviate hunger should not be treated as matters of partisan ideology or economic expediency. They are primarily moral issues, defining who we are as a people. From this angle, cuts to such programs represent a triumph of cruelty over compassion, of meanness over human empathy, of privileged individualism over national solidarity. For a country that prides itself on its democratic heritage, the extent of hunger and poverty in our midst is as shocking as it is shameful. Fifty million Americans live in a state of persistent food insecurity, among them children, elders, single moms, veterans, the long-term unemployed, and folks working at low-wage jobs. For these people, the question of how they are going to feed themselves and their kids is a gut-wrenching issue they face anew each day. Up to now many have been meeting the challenge with the aid of food stamps, but this support is fragile, and if Congress shrinks the program, that support will be gone.

This is something we can't allow to happen. It's basic ethics to believe that all human beings are entitled to live with dignity, which implies they must be provided with the means to realize their positive potentials. This belief makes inescapable demands on us as personal moral agents. It requires that we should be guided, not by the maxim to look out only for ourselves, but by the decrees of love and compassion and justice. We must extend our sphere of concern as far as it can reach, so that ultimately it embraces everyone, so that we regard each person as a center of infinite value, to be cherished and protected from harm.

From this universal perspective we then must act to rescue others from the sting of poverty. The pursuit of this ethical ideal, however, cannot be left solely to individual conscience and acts of charity, however worthy these may be. The moral imperative must be given a collective expression, by which everyone in unison demonstrates concern for everyone else. This is where government enters the picture. In a vigorous democracy, the actions of government mirror the values we cherish most deeply, translating our hopes and concerns into specific laws and policies. Under such conditions, government can become the channel through which we express human solidarity. It can serve as an instrument for maintaining the common good: for alleviating poverty, guaranteeing human rights, and protecting the most vulnerable.

In arriving at decisions, government needs an overarching vision. In a truly ethical society, the primary guideline to the formulation of public policy should be the question: “How would we want to be treated if we were in the tattered shoes of the other?” If we were hungry, sick, and poor, would we really believe that we must each look after ourselves alone? Would we argue that we must narrowly pursue our own personal good? Rather, we would maintain that as a nation we’re responsible for each other and should manifest this sense of responsibility through just laws and policies.

This conviction means that when our resources are sufficient to provide for the well-being of all—as they certainly would be if more stringent restrictions on accumulations of private wealth were adopted—we are morally obliged to provide for all. We can’t permit a powerful few to accumulate unprecedented wealth while others go hungry and cold or find themselves burdened by oppressive debt. Perfect equality may be an impossible ideal, but we should not tolerate extremes of inequality. Rigorous scientific research shows that more equal societies are healthier, happier, and more peaceful than unequal ones. In short, they are better for everyone, the rich as well as the poor.

At present, SNAP protects 47 million Americans against a fall into the abyss of food insecurity; it keeps them safe from the gruesome demons of hunger, malnutrition, and hunger-related illness. Certainly, SNAP is not a final answer to the problem of hunger in America. The final answer is a concerted effort to eliminate poverty by making sure that everyone in this country who is able to work can obtain meaningful jobs that pay living wages. But until we take up that campaign in earnest, SNAP will have to serve as a means to provide everyone with a place at the table. It will have to be our nation’s bulwark against the pangs of hunger and destitution. Despite the assault that SNAP has been facing in Congress, we must defend it and improve it from those who seek to undermine it. And on this basis we must then push forward with our efforts to eliminate hunger in America and more widely around the world.

This is a revised version of a longer post on the BGR blog, at <http://buddhistglobalrelief.wordpress.com/2013/06/24/the-values-that-guide-us/>

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## **BGR 2013 Projects**

**By Jessie Benjamin** – At the board meeting held on Sunday, May 5th, the BGR Board considered a slew of applications for partnership grants. Twenty-one projects were approved for the next fiscal year, at a total cost of \$285,000. The projects are both international and domestic. They include renewals of existing projects and a substantial number of new undertakings with partners both new and old. Their fields range from Cambodia and Vietnam, through India, Sri Lanka, Rwanda, Ethiopia, and Cote d’Ivoire, to Haiti, New York, and California. Distinctive about this year’s register is the number of multiyear projects that are to be launched. Experience has taught us that projects extending over several years provide a better timeframe for accomplishing more ambitious objectives than is possible with a one-year project.





### **1. New Project - Bangladesh: Making Markets Work for Women**

BGR will be partnering with Helen Keller International on a three-year program in Bangladesh called “Making Markets Work for Women.” The program aims to uplift 75 extremely poor indigenous households in five villages by training women in agricultural skills and food processing techniques and establishing community marketing groups for women to process and sell their products.

### **2. New Project - Bangladesh: Educating Children in the Chittagong Hill Tracts**

BGR will be sponsoring a three-year project with Moanoghar, a shelter for homeless and orphaned children founded by Buddhist monks in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh. The project will establish a sustainable educational system to improve the education of the children being schooled there.



### **3. Cambodia: System of Rice Intensification**

Rachana has been promoting the System of Rice Intensification (SRI), an ecologically sensitive agricultural methodology that more than doubles the yield of rice. BGR will continue its partnership with Rachana that will enable farmers to feed their own families and increase their income through selling the surplus of rice. The annually renewable program will promote SRI in eight villages.

### **4. Cambodia: Giving Girls Access to Education**

BGR will continue its partnership with Lotus Outreach International in support of its program “Girls Access to Education (GATE).” With support from BGR, Lotus Outreach provides 50 kg of rice monthly during the school year to the families of 50 poor girls in Siem Reap and Banteay Meanchey. With BGR support, Lotus Outreach has extended rice grants to 33 GATE graduates who have enrolled in university programs.





### 5. Cambodia: Helping Women Escape the Sex Trade

Driven by desperate poverty, many girls in Cambodia enter the sex trade in order to support themselves and their families. Lotus Outreach's "Non-Formal Education Program" teaches these women and their children basic literacy, health education, life skills, and vocational training so they can escape the sex trade. The renewed grant from BGR will provide assistance to approximately 30 sex workers and their children.

### 6. New Project - Côte d'Ivoire: Enhanced Homestead Food Production

BGR will be partnering with Helen Keller International on a three-year expansion of its innovative "Enhanced Homestead Food Production Program" in Côte d'Ivoire. The project is designed to improve food security and the nutritional status of vulnerable households through the establishment of year-round gardens. A key component of the program is growing orange-fleshed sweet potatoes, a food rich in micronutrients.



### 7. New Project - Ethiopia: Increasing Yields of Veggies

BGR will be partnering with Oxfam America on a project to improve food production in Ethiopia. The project will apply the System of Crop Intensification (SCI) to such crops as tomatoes, peppers, onions, cabbage, and potatoes. This method will increase vegetable production while reducing water use and reliance on chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

### 8. New Project – Haiti: A new Lease on Rice

Oxfam America and local partners in Haiti have been providing training in the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) to approximately 150 farmers in the country. A grant from BGR will enable them to extend the training to 30 additional farmers, support the purchase of labor-saving agricultural equipment, and restore irrigation canals.



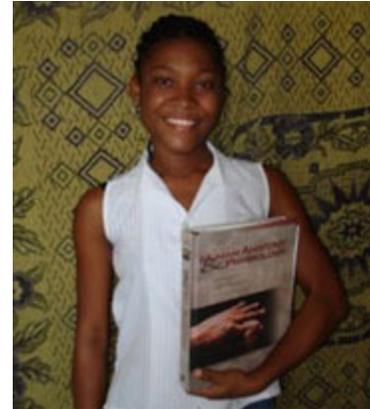


### 9. Haiti: Meals for Hungry Kids

A grant from BGR will continue to support the Lamanjay free meals program managed by the U.S.-based What If? Foundation in the Haiti capital, Port-au-Prince. Every weekday the program provides over a thousand children (and a few adults) with a plate of hot, nutritious food. For most children, this is their only meal of the day.

### 10. New Project - Haiti: Helping Kids Go To School

Thousands of school-aged children in Port-au-Prince lack formal education. The What If? Foundation now provides scholarships to 194 youngsters for tuition, transportation, books, uniforms, and other fees at an annual cost of \$250 to \$350 per student. BGR funds will provide \$115 per student toward the scholarship costs of 87 elementary school students.



### 11. India: Improving the Livelihoods of Poor Farmers

Last year BGR entered into a three-year partnership with the Badlao Foundation to improve the economic status of 150 marginalized families in the Deoghar district of Jharkhand state, one of the most impoverished districts in the country. The project aims to improve the economic status and financial independence of women, 88% of whom are moderately to severely malnourished.

### 12. India: A Women's Community Center in Nagpur

This is the second year of a two-year partnership between BGR and the Bodhicitta Foundation to support the establishment of a women's vocational training and community center in Nagpur, one of the largest cities in Maharashtra. The center provides women from the Dalit community with parental training, nutritional support, day care, health camps, and other services. It also offers counseling to women affected by domestic violence, a program for malnourished children, and basic medical and housing assistance.





### 13. India: Enhanced Food Security for Women Farmers

This is the second year of a three-year partnership with Oxfam India on a project located in the Tehri Gharwal district of the Uttarakhand region. The project, which will benefit more than 6,500 people in 1,200 households, aims to enhance food security for women farmers by building a sustainable production system that can prove resilient in the face of a changing climate.

### 14. New Project - Rwanda and Malawi: Training in Organic Agriculture

BGR is sponsoring a two-year project with Ecology Action of the Mid-Peninsula to provide training in the “Grow Biointensive” system of organic agriculture to farmers from Rwanda. This year four community leaders from Rwanda will be sent to Kenya to learn the system. On their return, they will train 3,600 Rwandan farmers in the method. The project also includes continued support for trainers in Malawi.



### 15. Sri Lanka: Empowering Young Women

For the third time, BGR will be sponsoring a year-long project with CENWOR (Centre for Women’s Research) in Sri Lanka. The project will enroll 60 young women, ages 17–25, for six months in courses run by the State Vocational Training Authority. After completion, the women will receive six months of placement assistance.

### 16. Vietnam: Meals for Hospital Patients

In Vietnam, the price of a hospital stay does not include meals, and thus families with a member in the hospital are hard pressed to buy food for themselves. For the fourth year, BGR has renewed funding that will provide two meals a day to patients throughout the year at the Tam Binh hospital. The Tam Binh chapter of the Red Cross of Vietnam, in collaboration with the local government, will feed the patients.





### 17. Vietnam: Scholarships for Poor Children

BGR will again sponsor scholarships to 400 elementary and middle school students from the poorest families in the school districts of Cam Duong and Tam Binh areas of Vietnam. The scholarships are given by the Red Cross of Vietnam to children in each of the two districts who achieve good grades and display good conduct.

### 18. Vietnam: System of Rice Intensification

This project, renewed for the third time, is conducted in partnership with the International Cooperation Center of Thai Nguyen University. The program will expand training in the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) to village farmers in three villages of Vo Nhai district, Thai Nguyen province.



### 19. NEW PROJECT - New York City: Feeding a Hunger for Meaning



The Reciprocity Foundation offers personal counseling, vocational training, and college preparatory coaching—along with meditation, yoga, and retreats—to homeless youth in New York City. The Foundation also runs a vegetarian meal program called “Starved for Meaning,” which seeks to provide the students with community, dialogue, gratitude, and meaning as well as healthy food. BGR funding will increase the capacity of the meal program and enable it to be improved in other ways.

### 20. New Project - New York City: The Urban Community Food Project

The Urban Community Food Project of the Urban Rebuilding Initiative seeks to build a sustainable food system in New York City to address poverty, food insecurity, and high incarceration rates in low-income communities. The Food Project will train at-risk youth, young adults, and formerly incarcerated men to convert urban spaces in local neighborhoods into food production sites. BGR funds will support the procurement of equipment and supplies to construct the first garden.





## 21. New Project - Santa Clara County: Building Organic Home Gardens

Valley Verde was launched to increase self-sufficiency and healthy eating among low-income immigrants and people of color in Santa Clara, California. This new project sponsored by BGR will recruit and support 60 low-income residents of Gilroy to cultivate and maintain organic home gardens. Participants will obtain organic gardening and leadership skills, as well as nutritional knowledge.

## Walk to Feed the Hungry in St. Louis

**By Kim Behan** - Last autumn, Ven. Jiru, founder and abbot of the Mid-American Buddhist Association (MABA) in Missouri, proposed to BGR chairman, Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, the idea of holding a Walk to Feed the Hungry in St. Louis, in the heart of the American Midwest. Bhante appreciated the idea and agreed to come. Not long afterward he received an invitation requesting him to come to St. Louis to lead the walk, which was scheduled for June 9th. The walk was held under the auspices of the Buddhist Council of Greater St. Louis.



Bhante traveled to St. Louis on June 4th and was brought to the MABA monastery in Augusta, right in the middle of the Missouri wine country. On June 7th and 8th he conducted a two-day retreat at the monastery. The retreat, attended by people who came from as far away as Iowa and Oklahoma, was based on the Uruga Sutta, the first poem in the Suttanipata. Recordings of all of Bhante's talks are [available online here](#).

On June 9th, the MABA community traveled to St.

Louis, a 50 minutes drive, where members from other Buddhist centers in the area were already gathering. The walk took place around the huge St. Louis Archway adjacent to the Mississippi River. Prominent roles in planning the event, besides the MABA team, were played by Dr. Kongsak Tanphaichitr of the Thai Buddhist temple and members of the Pure Mind Buddhist Center. Leonora Kham, the walk coordinator, helped make the event a successful fundraising opportunity for BGR. In total, about 75



people joined the walk, an excellent turnout considering that unfavorable weather had been predicted for the day.



As the crowd assembled, threatening rain clouds appeared overhead, discharging a burst of rain just as the walk began. But the Dharma-protecting sky deities quickly came to the aid of the walkers, and after five minutes of rain, the rainfall stopped and the walkers were able to continue along their route in peace. It was especially heartening to see families with children, and even a dog, participate: excellent training for kids to develop a compassionate mind. Everyone who walked rejoiced in this opportunity to act on behalf of the needy.

On his last full day in the area, Ven. Bodhi gave a Dharma talk at the Thai temple in a suburb of St. Louis. The lecture was originally scheduled for the Pure Mind Center but the large crowd that was expected necessitated a change in venue.

More photos of the St. Louis walk [can be seen here](#).



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## A GATE to Success for Cambodian Girls



*By Jennifer Russ* - The odds were against Luen Chanta.

By the time Chanta was a teenager, several factors were working against her. Strike one: her birthplace. Chanta was born in Cambodia, a country still struggling from the Khmer Rouge's murderous, anti-intellectual reign in the 1970's. Strike two: Her gender. Only 2% of Cambodian women receive a post-secondary education. With limited literacy and no employable skills, many Cambodian women are lured into sexual servitude. Strike three: in ninth grade, Chanta was orphaned.

Luckily, one of BGR's partners, Lotus Outreach, was waiting to help.

Lotus Outreach, a charity dedicated to the education, health, and safety of marginalized women and children in the developing world, recognized Chanta's potential and offered her assistance to maintain her independence and continue her education. After finishing high school, Chanta was accepted into a two-year teaching school. Chanta graduated and received her teacher certification with distinction in 2012. Her teaching examination scores were so high that she had the choice to teach anywhere in the country.

She chose to return home. "I am so happy to be working back in my home village," Chanta says.

The GATE program, founded in 2004, targets girls like Chanta – those who are unlikely to attend or stay in school. Currently, the GATE program provides primary and secondary educational scholarships to over 700 of the most vulnerable girls in Cambodia. These scholarships cover the direct and indirect costs of education, including materials, uniforms, and transportation. In addition, Lotus Outreach sends rice to the students and their families, assuring that the girls will not be removed from school to work. Buddhist Global Relief has been funding this rice stipend since 2009.



In 2010, with funding from BGR, Lotus Outreach launched a post-secondary scholarship program, the GATE Women and Youth Scholarship Fund (GATEways). Currently, GATEways supports 58 young women like Chanta who have graduated high school through GATE and wish to continue their education.

Chanta is one of hundreds of girls to benefit from the GATE and GATEways programs. Twenty-year-old An Sreyry, born into abject poverty and orphaned at the age of 9, is able to continue her education thanks to the rice Lotus Outreach provides to her family. Bou Chen, whose parents hardly produce enough to feed their family, studies English at Meanchey University.

By identifying vulnerable girls who are likely to be victims of violence and providing them with a safe environment and access to education, Lotus Outreach is making great strides against poverty and gender inequality in Cambodia – not only for the girls who receive scholarships, but for the countless Cambodians who will benefit from the effects of a growing community of educated girls.

Consider, for example, all of the girls Luen Chanta will inspire in her village. “I can be a role model,” she says, “and will help the children and families here to value education and stay in school as long as they can!” Thanks to Lotus Outreach and BGR, she will..

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## **BGR Team Visits Project Partners in New York City**

**By Jessie Benjamin** - This past Thursday, June 19th, a BGR team from the New York area visited three project partners in New York City. The team consisted of BGR chairman Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, Secretary Marcie Barth, and fundraising chair Sylvie Sun. Also joining the group was Ven. Sagarakkhanti, a monk resident at Chuang Yen Monastery, where Ven. Bodhi lives.



The group first visited Harry McNeary III, founder of the Urban Rebuilding Initiative. In August 2011 URI started the Urban Community Food Project, with the mission of building a sustainable food system throughout the City. The Food Project will train at-risk youth, young adults, and formerly incarcerated men to convert urban spaces in local neighborhoods into food production sites. The group met at the Tried Stone Baptist Church in the Bronx, where URI has been developing a garden. Harry, an inspirational young man with an uplifting vision for the Bronx, gave a short presentation on the aims of his organization. Just recently, in addition to the plot in the Baptist Church, URI acquired two more plots of land in the same neighborhood to turn into urban gardens.

The BGR group next visited Helen Keller International, with whom BGR has partnered on several projects over the past four years. At HKI the group had the fortune to meet Kathy Spahn, president and CEO of HKI, as well as Senior Manager Dan Fiedler and Peggy O'Neill, Vice President, Development and Communications.



BGR will be partnering with HKI on two new projects, both to extend over three years. One, in Bangladesh, is called “Making Markets Work for Women,” and aims to uplift 75 extremely poor indigenous households in five villages in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), one of the poorest regions in the country. The other is a three-year expansion of HKI’s Enhanced Homestead Food Production program in Côte d’Ivoire and is designed to improve the food security and nutritional status of vulnerable households, with special emphasis on women and young children.



Our last stop was the Reciprocity Foundation, directed by co-founder Adam Bucko, a remarkable young man who has been working with homeless youth for more than a decade. Adam’s unique vision, based on the idea of “radical acceptance,” guides the Reciprocity Foundation’s Whole Person approach to human development. In 2012, the Reciprocity Foundation started a vegetarian meal program called “Starved for Meaning,” which aims to fulfill the students’ hunger for food and more spiritual essentials, such as community, dialogue, gratitude, and meaning. BGR’s grant will help to increase the capacity of the vegetarian meal program and enable Reciprocity to hire a nutritionist. Adam’s book, *Occupy Spirituality*, is due out in September. It is coauthored with Matthew Fox, founder of Creation Spirituality..

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## **BGR 2013 Annual Meeting, A Volunteer’s Perspective**

**By Jessie Benjamin** - As a new volunteer for BGR, I attended the annual general meeting during the first weekend of May at Chuang Yen Monastery in Carmel, New York. I volunteered for BGR mainly because I was curious what it would be like to work for an all-volunteer organization where people have come together essentially to care for one another or, in Buddhist terms, to bring forth into the world the four "divine abodes" of loving kindness, compassion, altruistic joy and equanimity.



The meeting began with opening remarks given by BGR’s Chairperson, Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi. He described a “crisis of caring” in our world today where there are two divergent views of human nature. The first view is founded on the belief that the essential nature of human beings is one of self-interest, where people are driven by greed to satisfy their own ambitions. Success is measured by wealth, power, and social status. The premise of the opposing view is that the essential nature of human beings is one of care and empathy, where personal worth is defined by compassion, generosity, and service. It is the latter view that BGR nourishes and cultivates. There have been few times in my life when I have been moved to tears and this was one of them. It was the

refreshing, thirst-quenching feel of dharma rain. For me, the words succinctly and precisely described what is at the core of every political, social, and environmental issue of our time. It is an internal reckoning and alignment with our essential goodness.

Throughout the day, presentations were given by team members who had travelled from California, Colorado, Illinois, and Texas. Financial matters, 2012 accomplishments and project proposals for 2013 were discussed, as well as plans for walk events and a BGR benefit concert. Methods for shortening the response time to donors were explored. A presentation on marketing and outreach opportunities through the use of social media offered many fresh ideas for raising awareness about BGR's work. Finally, there was a discussion about the volunteer recruitment process. The meeting concluded with "sharing of merits" led by Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi. Of all the places that I could have been during this first weekend in May, I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to have spent it with such a caring group of people in support of such a visionary organization.

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## Translation Award for Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi



**By Kim Behan** - Our chairman and founder, Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, received a special honor in late April when he was informed that his translation of the Anguttara Nikaya, The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha, was chosen to receive the 2013 Khyentse Foundation Prize for Outstanding Translation Work. The prize was established by the well-known Bhutanese lama, Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche, founder and chairman of the Khyentse Foundation. The purpose of the prize is "encouraging and honoring excellence in translation works that make the Buddhist heritage accessible to a broader public." The Khyentse Foundation board set up the prize in 2011 and Ven. Bodhi's translation was the second work to receive it. The prize's selection committee is made of five Buddhist scholars: Naomi Appleton, Sarah McClintock, Tom Tillemans, Paul Harrison, and Peter Skilling. Peter Skilling is also the chair of the committee.

On May 27th, Ven. Bodhi traveled to New York to receive the prize from Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche, who was in New York on a short visit. Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche is also the founder of Lotus Outreach International, a humanitarian organization dedicated to serving and educating poor children in India and Cambodia. BGR has partnered with Lotus Outreach on numerous projects, among them the Girls Access To Education (GATE) and Non-Formal Education programs. Besides his eminence as a Buddhist teacher, Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche is also known as a filmmaker, his two major films being *The Cup* (1999) and *Travellers and Magicians* (2003).





Ven. Bodhi chose to divide the \$8,000 prize into two even portions. One portion of \$4,000 is to be used to send sets of the four Nikayas, in English translation, to libraries, monasteries, and other institutions around the world. The other portion was donated to BGR to fund projects in food aid, agricultural development, girls' education, and right livelihood training for women.

Press release from the Khyentse Foundation about the award [can be found here](#).

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## 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:

**Buddhist Global Relief**  
**PO Box 1611**  
**Sparta, New Jersey 07871 USA**

Thank you for your help!