



buddhist global relief



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Listening to Other Voices



By Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi - The Walk to Feed the Hungry awakens an enthusiastic response in us because its purpose resonates with our deep, heartfelt aspiration to make a positive impact on the world, to live for the benefit of others. By walking, we generate funds that will bring relief to poor communities around the globe, helping people emerge from poverty, chronic hunger, and malnutrition. But the walk does not only help the poor and hungry; it also helps us. For we too suffer from hunger: hunger for a deeper meaning and a higher purpose in our lives; hunger for connection; hunger to affirm the inherent value of human life; hunger to awaken our capacity for love and to express love in action.

The walk evokes the seed of goodness always present in us but too often covered up by the demands of living in a hectic society that thrives on greed, ambition, and competition. The walk evokes in us a different spirit—the spirit of generosity, compassion, and collaboration. It calls us to a different purpose—to open to the suffering of others and do something to remove their suffering. And that is why it turns on a light in our hearts and makes us smile so brightly.

In today's neoliberal economy, where the free market reigns supreme, all values are reduced to dollars and cents. Every drop of meaning and purpose is dried up by a worldview that registers everything in terms of its monetary worth. The market mentality teaches us to use people as tools, to extract whatever we can from them and then discard them without concern, like empty water bottles, with no need even to recycle. We take the same attitude toward nature: extract what it can yield and don't blink, even though we're damaging the vital support systems on which our lives depend. Even with the best intentions it's hard to escape this ideology. It envelops us like the air we breathe and permeates us like the food we eat.

In heeding the voice of the market ideology, we've been creating crisis after crisis—here an economic crisis, there a political crisis, almost everywhere an ecological crisis. If we're to come through intact, we'll need to listen to other voices. We'll have to listen to a voice that tells us to see ourselves in all other people and all other people in ourselves; to a voice that tells us that love and care and compassion are the bricks on the road to true fulfillment; to a voice that tells us to look at the Earth as our primal source, as a deep wellspring of inconceivable wonder and mystery. We'll have to listen to these voices very carefully, and not only listen but act, with circumspection, for everything depends on making the right choices.

The quality I believe we need most to propel the world toward the realization of our ideals is what I call “conscientious compassion.” This is a compassion that merges the vastness of the meditative mind with the boldness, courage, and conviction of the prophetic mind. Conscientious compassion doesn’t hang back, sweet and demure, passively rejoicing in its own goodness. Rather, it’s inspired by a fervent sense of conscience, by a fierce urge to bring the imperatives of our most compelling moral vision down into the real world; down into a world where flesh and blood humans struggle to prevail in a brutal system that denies their humanity; down into a system that treats people and animals and trees and mountains as mere resources to be squeezed for the sake of profit and then disposed of. Conscientious compassion doesn’t let us sit comfortably but bids us resist oppression and exploitation, exhorts us to rescue people from misery. Conscientious compassion links compassion to a commitment to justice, urging us to promote justice at multiple levels: social justice, economic justice, political justice, and legal justice.

To establish a just world—a world that works for everyone—we must begin by providing for people’s most basic needs, among which the need for food is paramount. But we don’t aim to stop at material security. We seek to provide people with sufficient healthy food so they can recover their sense of human dignity, obscured when all one can think about is where and when the next meal will materialize. We seek to provide people with sufficient healthy food so they can pursue their deeper aspirations, so they can unfold their creative, intellectual, and spiritual potentials.

One task involved in tackling global hunger that has gained special urgency today is the need to stand up against climate change; for there is a close connection between global warming and global hunger. A hotter climate reduces crop yields, turns fertile land barren, dries up precious sources of water, and triggers extreme weather events. Climate change endangers the food supply on which whole regions depend—in South Asia, Africa, China, and the grain basket of the U.S. If the planet’s temperature continues to rise, fertile land will turn into desert, and millions more people will be forced to face hunger, water shortages, unbearable heat waves, and premature death.

The problem of global warming confronts the entire human race—we’re all in this together, and we have to apply our collective intelligence and will to promote solutions. Success will require the implementation of new technologies, a new economic paradigm, tougher regulations, and real enforceable targets for reductions in carbon emissions. But it will also require new values—values that exalt the dignity of human beings, the value of community, and the integrity of the Earth above the bottom line of profits and power for a few.

In seeking to steer the economy away from its dependence on fossil fuels, we’ll also have to be audacious. We’ll have to call the bluff of those who benefit by heating up the planet—the carbon barons and their lackeys in Congress and the media—demanding that they put the flourishing of life above their mansions and stock portfolios and private planes. Never before has humanity faced a crisis of such proportions. Never before has our common humanity, our common fragility, been made so plain.

Yet this is not only a formidable challenge, but an opportunity—a unique chance for us to transcend our narrow, self-centered ways of thinking dominated by short-term interests. But for this we’ll need a wide-angle lens, a universal perspective that will allow us to see humanity as a single interconnected family. Our Walk to Feed the Hungry can be regarded as one small expression of this commitment. It brings us together, under a common banner, to put our feet to work helping countless people we will never meet. It joins us to one another, it joins us to everyone in need, and it joins us to the Buddha’s great compassionate resolve to rescue the world from suffering.

This is an abridged and edited version of Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi's talk at the conclusion of the 2013 New York Walk to Feed the Hungry..

Supporting Women Farmers: A Key to Sustainable Agriculture

By Charles W. Elliott - At Buddhist Global Relief, we challenge ourselves to identify the most effective ways to advance our mission of addressing world hunger. Agricultural growth and development is a primary means to tackle both hunger and poverty, said to be “at least twice as effective in reducing poverty as growth generated by other sectors.”¹ As the world faces a crisis of food insecurity, the full contribution of women is vitally needed to ensure this expansion of agricultural growth.



We support programs that specifically promote the full participation of women farmers in expanding sustainable agriculture in their communities.

These include programs such as Helen Keller International's (HKI) “Making Markets Work for Women,” training Bangladeshi women in agricultural skills such as pest management, organic fertilizer use, and intercropping, as well as food processing techniques and marketing skills; establishing community marketing groups for women to work together to process and sell their products; the Badlao Foundation's establishing a women farmers' association in India for the distribution of saplings, seeds, and other materials, and providing education in agriculture, farmer rights and responsibilities and gender issues; and HKI's program to increase food production in Cote d'Ivoire by teaching women in community garden groups the skills needed to create year-round gardens and farms.

The reasons we support women farmers are familiar and clear. Rural women produce half of the world's food and, in developing countries, between 60 percent and 80 percent of food crops. Women also are more likely than men to spend their income on the well-being of their families: on more nutritious foods, school fees for children and health care. Thus, when we support the role of women in agriculture, we directly reduce poverty.

Because small-scale women farmers represent the majority of the rural poor in developing countries, to have the greatest impact in reducing poverty, agricultural investment and development policies must support these farmers. Agricultural investments, however, do not reflect these facts. Women in forestry, fishing and agriculture have received just seven percent of total aid for all sectors, a significant underinvestment.²

However, we need more than increased direct economic investment to support women farmers. Historically, women face significant barriers to realizing their full potential in all sectors of the global economy, including agriculture. Broader reforms are necessary to surmount gender-based barriers that prevent access to productive resources. These barriers often include land inheritance policies and laws, impaired access to credit, and inequalities in ownership of equipment and farm animals. Since cultural norms and institutionalized discrimination often lie behind these barriers, enabling women to fully participate in the agricultural sector, will ultimately require that social structures and cultural norms be reshaped.

In the fight to combat world hunger, we urgently need the full contribution of women as the world confronts the three overlapping crises of food price spikes, global financial turmoil, and ecological threats. In fact, Olivier DeSchutter, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food, goes so far as to say that “[g]ender equality is the single most important determinant of food security.”

By empowering women farmers, we also feed and empower their families, their children, and the generations that follow. In this way we help create a more just and food-secure world.

For more information, please see:

UN FAO, The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011, “Women in Agriculture- Closing the gender gap for development,” 2011. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/i2050e/i2050e00.htm>

Olivier De Schutter, “Gender Equality and Food Security: Women’s Empowerment as a Tool Against Hunger,” (FAO/Asian Development Bank), 2013. (<http://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/pub/2013/gender-equality-and-food-security.pdf>)

1. World Development Report 2008. Agriculture for Development. Washington DC: The World Bank, October 2007.
2. OECD. 2008. Aid in Support of Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment. OECD-DAC Secretariat. July 2008.

*Originally written for the FAO World Food Day 2013
PHOTO CREDIT: Helen Keller International/Trevor Snapp*

Getting Well In Cambodia



By Jennifer Russ - Like a bean plant in dry, barren soil, families forced to spend all their resources on survival cannot grow. This is the case along the Cambodia-Vietnam border, where many rural Cambodians spend much of their money on the most essential resource: water.

Take, for example, Mrs. Kong Ya, a Cambodian farmer in the Svay Rieng region who, like many mothers, wanted her family to eat their vegetables. More specifically, she wanted them to eat vegetables from her family garden. Unfortunately, water access in Svay Rieng becomes difficult during the dry season, forcing residents to purchase clean water. Unable to afford the water to grow produce, Kong had to buy expensive, pesticide-laden vegetables from Vietnamese farmers.

Families like Kong’s are often left with no expendable income, and their lives become a day-to-day struggle just to find the sustenance to survive. And the dry season isn’t the only time families struggle.

During the rainy season, children seeking water in area streams face waterborne illnesses or the danger of drowning in flooded riverbanks.

Kong, her family, her village, and her country needed a hand—and that's exactly what BGR's partner in Cambodia, Lotus Outreach, offered them with their Getting Well program. With the help of the Santi Sena Organization (SSO) and a grant from BGR, Lotus Outreach constructed ten community wells across six villages along the Vietnam border, providing steady access to safe, clean water all year long to 158 families.



Strong believers in a “hand up, not hand out” approach, Lotus Outreach wanted to be sure their beneficiaries were invested in the success of their new wells. That's why they created Water-well User Groups, communities that oversee the upkeep of the well and contribute to their maintenance. Their idea worked. Out of the 799 people who benefitted from the wells, 711 joined Water-well User Groups.



Now, Kong has more than home grown vegetables for her family—she has a source of supplemental income. After feeding her family nutritious vegetables like morning glory, green cabbage, spinach, ride-gourd, and long beans, she takes the extra vegetables to the market and sells them for cash. Where Kong was once spending all her money, she is now making money, finally allowing her family to grow. Thankful for the “hand up” from Lotus Outreach, SSO, and BGR, Kong took the position of leader of her Water User Group. She offers a hand up to others, too, sharing farming and nutrition advice with her friends and family.

Lotus Outreach's efforts multiplied exponentially when the Getting Well project caught the eye of high ranking government officials and organizations. Other non-profits, like the Cambodian Red Cross, joined in, building a total of 38 wells in the region, providing an ample supply of water to the entire Svay Rieng region.

Now that Lotus Outreach and BGR have offered them a hand, Svay Rieng is a watered garden growing something more precious than vegetables: healthy, safe families who may someday lend helping hands to others.

Behind the Scenes at the Walks to Feed the Hungry

By Kim Behan & Carla Prater - Since 2010, the fall has been “Walk season” for BGR. The Walks to Feed the Hungry (and the concert or other activity) have been our signature fundraising events, and have accounted for a growing percentage of our annual revenues. The walks are also instrumental in spreading the word about BGR and its mission, attracting volunteers, and establishing BGR as a presence in Buddhist communities across the U.S. and overseas.

It should be no surprise that organizing and running events like this takes an enormous amount of work. The season begins for BGR staff at least six months before the first walk, when we start planning our advertising campaign for print and online media. This involves assembling a team of writers and graphic designers. Two of the first tasks we do are getting insurance coverage for all the walks and revising the Walk Guide to incorporate lessons learned from the previous year’s events.



The next task is to plan and implement changes to the BGR website and the FirstGiving BGR main page and event pages for each of the locations that will be holding a fundraiser. The team of writers and designers is supplemented with our IT team and the able assistance of FirstGiving staff for this task.

About three months before the first event, we begin holding conference calls every two weeks with the local walk coordinators. This is an opportunity for us to share ideas and resolve issues in a collaborative manner.



By the time the big day rolls around, local teams are in place to register walkers who have not preregistered, collect donations, pass out information, lead the walk, and serve as emcees for Dharma talks, prayers, chants, and other activities. These are crucial tasks that ensure the events run smoothly, and they must all be planned well in advance.

The staff and board of BGR send their heartfelt thanks and appreciation to all the local walk coordinators, their teams, the temples and Dharma organizations, and all other participants in the 2013 walk season. We thank Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, all the BGR Walk coordinators and their local teams, and BGR members who made this work possible!





Those who would like to organize local walks in their own area, or join the team for established walks, should contact info@buddhistglobalrelief.org

Cambodia Solidarity Walks

By Carla Prater - One of the best things to come out of our annual “Walk Season” has been the Solidarity Walks organized by some of our project partners. This year, in Banteay Meanchey, Cambodia on October 1st, the Lotus Outreach GATE scholarship recipients joined in a walk that also coincided with the opening of the new academic year.

About 500 people participated, including the scholarship students, other students, teachers and project workers. They walked from a Buddhist temple to Svay Chek High School carrying banners written in both Khmer and English with the BGR and Lotus Outreach logos and the inscription: “Walk To Feed The Hungry: A Worldwide Walk of Compassion.”



After the walk, all the students joined the opening ceremony for the new academic year and the scholarship students received their scholarship packages. It was a beautiful expression of solidarity with the donors around the world who have worked so hard this fall to raise money in support of projects like the GATE scholarships.



Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi Leads Hunger Initiative at Syracuse University

By Carla Prater - On September 16th and 17th, BGR chair Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi initiated the local anti-hunger campaign in Syracuse, New York, with a special appearance at Syracuse University. On the evening of September 16th he presented the keynote lecture of the Syracuse Symposium on “Listening” on the topic, “Engaged Buddhism: Listening and Responding to World Hunger.” The lecture, given at the Hendricks Chapel, was well attended by university faculty, students, and people from the local community. The following morning, Bhante led a mini-seminar on the topic at the University Humanities Center. The seminar brought together members of the faculty involved with global hunger, graduate

students, and leaders from the city's hunger relief organizations. Over the two days of Bhante's visit, information about various hunger relief efforts was made available in the lobby of the science building.

In the fall of 2012, His Holiness the Dalai Lama gave a public talk at Syracuse University on the theme "Common Ground for Peace." The university's Buddhist chaplain Jikyo Bonnie Shoultz saw Bhante's visit as a sequel to the Dalai Lama's talk: "His Holiness reminded us to engage in acts of compassion and kindness that might create change. This special visit by Bhikkhu Bodhi offers an opportunity to explore ways in which engaged listening can move people to acts of compassion, particularly as they relate to world hunger."

During his stay in Syracuse, Ven. Bodhi was kindly hosted by the Zen Center of Syracuse under the leadership of abbess Senge Sherry Chayat and head monastic Jikyo Bonnie Shoultz.

News: BGR Responds to Super-Typhoon Haiyan



Thanks to the continued generosity of our supporters, BGR had funds available to make an emergency donation of \$10,000 to the relief efforts for the people affected by the terrible devastation caused by Super-Typhoon Haiyan, which hit the Philippines and Vietnam last month. This was divided equally between the World Food Programme and Doctors Without Borders. One of our prominent donors matched our donation with a \$10,000 donation of his own.

We have all been touched by the needs of the survivors, and were very glad to be able to support these two organizations as they provide essential food and medicine to people in need in the affected areas. If you wish to do more, we urge you to consider making a donation to:



1. The [United Nations World Food Programme](#) – the world's largest humanitarian agency fighting hunger.
 2. [Oxfam International](#) is accepting donations for emergency relief.
 3. [Doctors Without Borders](#) has sent emergency teams bringing lifesaving medical care to the areas affected by the typhoon.
 4. You can also make a \$10 donation to UNICEF USA by texting "RELIEF" to 864233.
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News: BGR and Amazon Smile Program



Buddhist Global Relief is now participating in the Smile program on Amazon.com! By going to the [AmazonSmile](#) website the shopper will find exactly the same products and prices as on the regular

Amazon website, but 0.5% of each purchase will be donated to the charity of their choice. When you login to shop at the Smile site, you will be prompted to select a charity from a preset list, or search for another charity. If you wish to donate to Buddhist Global Relief, simply type the name into the space, and you're done! All your eligible purchases will be marked "Eligible for AmazonSmile donation" in the box on the right that gives the price, and will generate a donation. For more information about the program, see <https://smile.amazon.com/about>. We hope you will make Buddhist Global Relief the charity of your choice!

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. Right now we are looking for volunteers to form a team that can manage our Facebook and Twitter pages. Some volunteers need to be located in a particular place, but most can work from home, wherever that may be. Please check the list of [Volunteer Opportunities](#) on our website and contact our volunteer coordinator at <mailto:miroehm@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!