



buddhist global relief



helpinghands

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## What Would the Buddha Do?



**By David Loy** - Every modern generation feels confronted by some crisis that will affect the fate of the world, but unless your head is buried in the sand it's impossible to ignore the extraordinary planetary emergency that confronts us today. The recent IPCC report states clearly that ecological collapse no longer merely threatens—we are well into it. It's become apparent that civilization as we know it is about to be transformed in some very uncomfortable ways by climate breakdown, mass extinction of species, resource depletion, and various types of pollution—perhaps including some kinds we don't even know about yet.

Although our globalizing economic system is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the biosphere, most of the CEOs who supervise it (as much as anyone controls it) can't seem to plan much further than the next quarterly report, anymore than most politicians can think further than the next election. Overpopulation and the deprivation of basic necessities for vast numbers of people threaten social breakdown, while the mainstream media distract us with infotainment and assurances that the solution to our problems is more of the same—accelerating consumerism and a growing GDP.

Such is the critical situation we find ourselves in today, and Buddhists, like everyone else, need to face up to it quickly. Our practice needs to extend beyond our sitting cushions and meditation halls, to embrace a broader understanding of what is happening in our world, to our world. Like Kwan Yin, we need to hear and respond to its pain. Sometimes we think that Buddhist practice means "just seeing, just hearing, just feeling is good!—concepts are bad." There are times and places when we need to focus on immediate sensory and mental phenomena. Nevertheless, such meditation by itself is not enough. We must also employ our critical faculties to understand the challenges facing us today. Concepts and generalizations are not bad in themselves. The problem is the ways we misuse them.

Believing that mindfulness means attentiveness only to my immediate surroundings amounts to another version of the basic problem: our sense of disconnection from each other and from the world we are "in." Anatta, the Buddhist teaching of "not-self," means that it is delusive to separate "my own best interests" from those of others. As the law of karma implies, the world is not that kind of zero-sum game.

Two other Buddhist responses attempt to justify focusing solely on one's own practice and awakening: "I must tend to my own liberation before I can be of service to others" and "From the highest point of view all living beings are 'empty,' so we needn't worry about their fate, or that of the biosphere." Neither of these answers will do, because both are half-truths at best.

To begin with, we can't wait until we have overcome all our own suffering before addressing that of others. Events are speeding up, and they are not going to wait for you and me to attain great enlightenment. We need to do what we can according to who we are right now, including where we are in our practice right now.

Moreover, this objection misunderstands how spiritual practice works. We don't wait until we overcome our self-centeredness before engaging with the world; addressing the suffering of the wider world is how we overcome our self-centeredness. Contrary to a common way of understanding the bodhisattva path, bodhisattvas don't defer their own perfect enlightenment in order to help others; helping others is how they perfect their enlightenment. We awaken from our own self-suffering into a world full of suffering, with the realization I am not separate from that world.

What would the Buddha do? To answer this question is to determine how to apply the most important Buddhist teachings to our present situation. The most distinctive Buddhist teaching is also the one that gives us the most insight into the collective crises confronting us: the relationship between suffering (in the broadest sense) and the delusive sense of a self that feels disconnected from others. Such a self is inherently uncomfortable, because always insecure, and the ways it often tries to secure itself (to feel more "real") tend to make things worse. This essential truth about the individual self holds true for "collective selves," which also try to secure themselves by promoting their own group self-interest at the price of other groups. This gets to the heart of why sexism, racism, nationalism, militarism, and speciesism (our alienation from the other beings of the biosphere) are self-defeating. If sense of separation is the problem, embracing interdependence must be at the heart of any solution.

Without healthy societies, the possibilities for fulfilling human activity, including the path to enlightenment, are damaged. Without a healthy biosphere, those possibilities may be destroyed. Interdependence is not merely an insight to be cultivated on our cushions. A suffering world calls upon us to realize interdependence—to make it real—in the ways we actually live.

David Loy is a noted Buddhist author and teacher and an adviser of BGR. An earlier version of this essay appeared on Huffington Post, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-loy/what-would-the-buddha-do\\_b\\_5085001.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-loy/what-would-the-buddha-do_b_5085001.html)

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## When Breaking with Tradition Fills Bellies

**By Jennifer Russ** - It's that time of year when many of us roll up our sleeves, don our gloves, and get dirty for the sake of our gardens. Chances are, while we work, we'll be thinking of our mothers, fathers, grandparents, or neighbors — whoever taught us how to garden. Our tips and tricks—coffee grounds and crushed eggshells under our tomato plants or banana peels under rosebushes—often come from those we love. And that's why we're reluctant to give them up, even after learning they're not scientifically sound.



It's a similar story in many of the world's farm fields, where rural farming families use the same methods generation after generation to grow their crops. Unlike the average suburban gardener, they aren't risking a rose-less rosebush or a few split tomatoes if they aren't following best practices. They're risking their livelihood.

That's where organizations like Oxfam America come in. With a grant from BGR, Oxfam is working with farmers in the Artibonite Valley in Haiti to teach them how to increase their rice yields and manage their

profits. At the beginning of the planting season of 2013, BGR's grant allowed Oxfam and local partners AILA and MAFLPV to facilitate local credit for 400 farmers and train 300 of them in the System of Rice Intensification (SRI), a method that increases yields and decreases input of pesticide, herbicide, and chemical fertilizer.

It isn't easy to convince farmers to switch from traditional farming techniques to a newer one, particularly when at first the newer one is more difficult. SRI requires labor-intensive land preparation in order to be effective. To ease the burden, Oxfam helped AILA and MAEFLPV purchase basic agricultural tools to loan to farmers.

The switch paid off. The 141 farmers who adopted SRI last year produced between one and two metric tons per hectare more than those who continued traditional farming techniques.

Necker Aristilde is one of the farmers who adopted SRI and benefited from his ability to take low-interest loans. Caring for seven people, including his daughter and her five children, Mr. Aristilde was often stretched too thin, suffering from malnutrition and vertigo. Before this project, he had tried to take the steps necessary to improve his rice cultivation, but he could not borrow money because he had nothing to offer as a guarantee. He recalls a day when, after being denied a loan, he sat at the gate of the bank, so hungry he had no energy to stand.

Thanks to this project, Mr. Aristilde received agricultural credit and support, and he has increased his yield enough to ensure that he and his family are able to eat every day, for the first time in a long time. He was also able to purchase four goats, three chickens, and a turkey.

Even farmers in the region who did not adopt SRI reported a yield increase, suggesting that they benefited from the support of Oxfam and its partners. The result is more than just food for farmers and their families. Dieuta Robert, a mother of two teenagers, is finally able to send her children to school with her extra income. The lessons in farming and financial management she passes along to her children will turn into traditions worth keeping.

Jennifer Russ has been writing for Buddhist Global Relief since 2012. She lives and teaches in northwest New Jersey.

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## The People's Climate March – To Bend the Course of History



**By Ven. Bhikkhuni Santussika** - People around the world are experiencing the devastating effects of climate change with cataclysmic storms, droughts, floods, wildfires, and sea-level rise taking lives, destroying homes, impacting food security, and reducing access to fresh water. Desperate to bring world leaders together in commitments of concrete action on climate, the UN Secretary General has called a summit for September 23rd, to be held in New York City. In solidarity and support, organizations and individuals by the tens of thousands from across the US are planning to converge on New York on the weekend of September 20th and 21st for [The People's Climate March](#), which will be the largest demonstration for climate action in history.

Those traveling from the West Coast to New York can come on [The People's Climate Train](#), where there will be presentations, discussions, inspiring stories, and networking. Buddhist Global Relief will be a participating organization in the People's Climate March and a sponsor of the People's Climate Train. In

such capacity, BGR urges everyone who can join the march to do so, and for those along the train route, to get on board. Everyone's help is needed.

As our Dharma practice deepens, it begins to inform and influence everything we do, including how we engage with the important moral and social issues of our times. At this moment in human history, the unrestrained extraction and burning of fossil fuels has brought us, in the industrialized nations, to a point where we are contaminating and pillaging the earth to such an extreme that we are endangering all life on this planet. Nothing could be further from the intention and practice of Dharma.

The Dharma encourages us to take a hard look at what is happening, mindfully experience the feelings that arise, and seek out appropriate action to extract ourselves from these destructive practices. We need to set a new course for our society towards wholesome, sustainable, and compassionate living. We cannot accomplish this through individual action, no matter how hard we try. The systems themselves must be changed. We need to come together in massive numbers to exert enough influence to make the systemic changes that are needed.

As the people of planet Earth join in this common task, Dharma practitioners have a special gift to offer by bringing our practice into this extremely important undertaking. We come with a quiet dignity, a depth of calm, and all the mindfulness and compassion we can muster. We certainly won't be the only ones. Serious practitioners of all faiths will be there to support this process towards a powerful, positive conclusion.

The People's Climate March is intended to be for everyone. As the description of the event says, "This will be a family-friendly event. The tone and tenor will be dignified, fun, impactful and empowering, and we are committed to making sure that it is permitted, peaceful and safe for all who come." There is nothing intended here that goes against our principles as practitioners. In fact, what would go against those principles would be to sit idling by as the world burns in the flames of our destructive practices.



So now we have this opportunity to act, to make a real difference, to lend our moral voice to this great movement. This is a movement for the benefit of all beings, like nothing that has ever happened on this planet before. We are all in this together. Every living being on Earth faces the same danger. As we act by participating in this march, we are taking up the care and protection of every species on Earth, both those of the present and those of future generations. Mark the weekend of September 20th and 21st on your calendar now. This is Dharma in action.

I hope to walk with you as we go together to bend the course of history.

Bhikkhuni Santussika is the founder of Karuna Buddhist Vihara in Mountain View, California. She is a board member of Buddhist Global Relief.

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## News: BGR Meets in Early May to Select New Projects

**By Kim Behan** - BGR team members held their annual general meeting on Saturday, May 3rd, followed the next day by a board meeting which focused on the selection of projects for our next fiscal year, which runs from July 1st, 2014 through June 30th, 2015. Both meetings took place at Chuang Yen Monastery, headquarters of the Buddhist Association of the United States. Team members came from across the US, even from such distant states as California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Texas.

At the board meeting on May 4th, the board approved twenty-three projects for partnership grants in the next fiscal year, at a total cost of \$348,250. This marked a 22 percent increase over the \$285,000 allocated at the previous year's project meeting. Several projects are renewals of those that have already proved their worth, while others are new undertakings with partners both new and old. Projects approved include several multiyear programs, which greater support for BGR has now made feasible. Experience has taught us that programs extending over several years allow for the pursuit of bolder goals than is possible with one-year projects.

A six-part series of posts giving brief summaries of the BGR projects can be found on the BGR blog, beginning with [Part 1 here](#). Projects are arranged alphabetically by country. International projects precede the U.S. projects, which are described in the final post. Patti Price, chair of the Projects Committee, along with Jessie Benjamin, David Liu, Carla Prater, and Jennifer Russ, all helped prepare the material used in this series.

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## News: Concert To Feed The Hungry



**By Dan Blake** - In June 2011, the "Concert to Feed the Hungry" was conceived as a response to Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi's clarion call for compassionate action to address "the palpable suffering of real human beings" around the world. But what role can music play in addressing such intractable problems as chronic hunger and malnutrition?

I believe that music in and of itself can be a compassionate act, with the potential, through listening and feeling, to raise consciousness to a basic vibrational level that binds communities together. But while a musical performance may inspire such a sense of solidarity, music on its own cannot feed the hungry. This is why we musicians must align ourselves with an organization like Buddhist Global Relief, which has set a clear and tangible goal of relieving chronic hunger and malnutrition worldwide.

This year's concert took place on April 25 at the Interchurch Center in Manhattan's Morningside Heights neighborhood. The performance featured Grammy-winning bassist/vocalist Esperanza Spalding and the pianist, composer, and Guggenheim Fellow Kenny Werner. Both gave rousing performances that were supported by months of preparation by the concert volunteer team.

The concert was greater than the sum of its parts. Turnout and proceeds from the evening exceeded our expectations. Funds went to support BGR projects and to benefit organizations like Harlem Seeds, which educates the young people of Harlem in urban farming, sustainable living, and healthy nutrition. But more than just a successful fundraising event, that evening we created a community permeated with compassionate listening that seemed to pour out of the concert hall and into the world around us.

The Concert to Feed the Hungry has much more ground to cover, but this year's event was a collective stride in the right direction. Gratitude to all the musicians, volunteers, and the Interchurch Center for a job well done!



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## News: 2014 Walk Events Start Early!



**By Kim Behan and Carla Prater** - Two successful Walks to Feed the Hungry have already taken place this spring, and more are planned for the fall. On March 23rd, twenty-six walkers met at the beautiful Philippe Park in Safety Harbor for the first BGR Walk in Florida. They enjoyed the lovely day and the fellowship while raising awareness of BGR and its mission as well as funds to help the poor. On May 10th, about fifteen walkers and assorted dogs met in Surrey UK, and had a great walk through the fields and woods of Puttenham Common.

Other walks are planned for the fall in Ann Arbor, Houston, Los Angeles, New York, Sacramento, San Francisco, San Jose, Seattle, St. Louis, and Willington, Connecticut. More news on the fall walks will appear later in the Helping Hands newsletter, on our website, and in email appeals.





We hope you will join one of these walks, contribute to your friends' fundraising pages on FirstGiving, or start your own committee in your hometown to explore the possibility of holding an event where you live, whether it be a walk, a day of meditation, a concert, or whatever will fit your location. BGR Staff can help by providing a detailed Local Coordinator's Guide and assistance in setting up FirstGiving pages and other tasks. We hope this year is our best yet for fundraising to support our projects around the world!

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## News: CFC Fundraising



**By Kim Behan** - We are pleased to announce that BGR has been accepted for the 2014 Combined Federal Campaign (CFC), under number 74375. This is the second year BGR will be participating in this campaign. Last year our participation raised more than \$10,000 for BGR projects. We hope to increase our outreach efforts with CFC this year and raise even more money.

The CFC is the only agency authorized to solicit donations from employees of the Federal government on behalf of charitable organizations. BGR will be listed along with a number of other organizations. Once a year the CFC holds donation events at many locations around the country. These provide a wonderful opportunity for our supporters who work for the Federal government in any capacity to donate to BGR.

We hope to have a booth at CFC events in many states this year to pass out promotional materials and inform interested individuals about our work. If you wish to help with this effort, or to join the Speaker's Bureau--which involves presenting a prepared three-minute speech about BGR to an audience at CFC events--please go to our [website](#), where we will be listing new volunteer opportunities. Alternatively, you can email us at [info@buddhistglobalrelief.org](mailto:info@buddhistglobalrelief.org).

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## How You Can Help

Opportunities are available now to assist with Walks to Feed the Hungry in many locations this fall, and to do outreach for the 2014 Combined Federal Campaign. If you are interested in helping out with these or other efforts, check out the list of [Volunteer Opportunities](#) on our website. Some volunteers need to be located in a particular place, but most can work from home, wherever that may be. Please contact us at [info@buddhistglobalrelief.org](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!

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