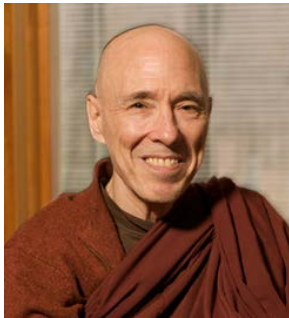




All Lives Do Matter



By Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi - Over the past two weeks, deeds of horrific violence have erupted across the globe, tearing at the strings of the heart. A suicide bombing in Ankara on March 13 killed forty people, the latest in a series of bombings in Turkish cities. Two suicide bombings took place in Brussels a week ago, at the airport and on a train, killing more than thirty, turning an ordinary business day into a nightmare. On Easter Sunday in Lahore, a major city in Pakistan, a suicide bombing in a park claimed the lives of more than seventy people, most of them women and children enjoying a family outing.

Another suicide bombing in a soccer stadium in Iraq, south of Baghdad, killed thirty, mostly youngsters.

Such deeds testify to a shocking disregard for human life that has spread like wildfire from country to country. These acts of senseless violence leave us speechless, stricken with grief for the victims, shaken by sorrow, anxious perhaps that in the weeks and months ahead we ourselves might just happen to find ourselves standing at the wrong place at the wrong time. Yet the number of lives these deeds of desperate cruelty claim, while shocking, is still miniscule compared to another kind of violence that is all the more pernicious because it does not strike suddenly out of the blue but creeps up slowly, imperceptibly, like a viper hidden in the grass. This is the violence, often lethal violence, inflicted by global systems and institutions that are considered normal, inevitable, and even respectable.

Such violence does not snuff out lives in a matter of seconds, and thus it does not grab headlines, send shock waves around the world, and draw forth eloquent words of sympathy from global leaders. It seldom even registers in our consciousness. Unless we are affected, it does not shake our faith in the predictable order of things. But this kind of structural violence is also deadly. It takes lives, the lives of many people who never expected to fall victim to institutions they trusted and took for granted. It takes lives slowly, over extended periods of time, and thus the death toll does not appear as a neat, quotable sum. At the end of a year or decade, however, when the calculations are made, the number of lives lost is to be counted not in the dozens or hundreds, but in the thousands and even millions.

The forms that institutional violence takes are many. There is hardly a need to mention the military-industrial complex and the weapons manufacturers, which thrive in dependence on wars around the world. The tobacco industry for decades denied the connections between cigarette smoking and lung cancer. Its spokesmen protested before Congress, and they even hired scientific experts to testify that such a connection was non-existent. Yet the deception cost millions of lives. Pharmaceutical corporations, too, keep the prices of drugs sky-high, beyond the reach of those who need them. In order to maintain their high profit margin, they have also refused to allow countries in the global South to

market generic forms of their life-saving drugs, with deadly consequences. The fossil fuel corporations continue to extract and promote coal, oil, and gas, while blocking grants to facilitate a switch to renewables. They thus go on increasing carbon emissions, which escalates global warming and brings on droughts, floods, heat waves, and wildfires, all of which cost millions of lives.

The food industry is another major establishment that has been responsible for the early deaths of millions around the world. Dominated by giant agri-business conglomerates, with links to chemical and transport corporations, the industry has flourished by making food production dependent on the use of toxic chemicals that enter our bodies, causing cancers and organ failure. In Sri Lanka's North Central Province, the nation's rice basket, an estimated 70,000 to 400,000 farmers have been affected by a lethal kidney disease that researchers trace to the use of agri-chemicals. In India, farmers are forced into the trap of a debt-based system that drives the most desperate to suicide. Over the past twenty years, some 300,000 Indian farmers have taken their own lives, mostly because of debts incurred to purchase costly fertilizer, pesticides, and seeds. Often these farmers are further driven to desperation by crop failures caused by lack of adequate rainfall, probably a result of climate change. With the pushing of GMOs, the impact on human health is still unpredictable.

The untimely death of innocent people may be sudden, triggered by suicide bombers – by men and women whose minds have been warped by a toxic ideology picked up in madrassas and rented rooms – or it may be slow and gradual, brought on by corporate enterprises managed by respectable executives in glass skyscrapers, people who in their own communities might be models of responsible citizenship. What unites them, despite their differences, is a conviction that certain lives are disposable. For the Islamist bomber, it is the lives of Americans, Europeans, Iraqis, or Pakistanis going about their day-to-day business, simply because they follow the wrong religion or a wrong version of the one true faith. For the chemical company or petroleum firm, it might be the lives of brown and black people on the other side of the world, or the urban underclass in Texas and Oklahoma, simply because they are poor, nameless, and far out of sight.

The belief that certain lives don't matter may take the form of a conscious conviction, as is held by the terrorist, or it may be an unspoken premise underlying a system that puts profits above people. But when one adopts this belief, either as a conscious conviction or simply as a corollary of the imperative to maximize corporate profits, there is no line one will not cross in pursuit of one's aim, even when others must die for the greater cause. In the case of terrorist violence, the death of innocents can be dismissed because the victims were infidels. In the case of structural violence, such deaths can be written off as "collateral damage."

What is needed to counter these trends, and to prevent the heart-breaking tragedies they bring about, is a recognition that every life matters, that all lives matter. Every life matters because every person is a center of subjective experience. Because I see myself as a center of subjective experience I believe that my own life matters, that I deserve the optimal conditions to flourish and realize my potentials. I know that I want to live and not to die prematurely; I know that I wish to be happy and not to suffer. Yet it takes just a slight act of the imagination, a subtle shift in consciousness, to realize that the same is true about everyone. If we can let our minds expand and see the world as a *community of subjects*, of people who are not just nameless faces, who are not mere objects, but subjects exactly like ourselves, centers of experience, beings who can feel joy and sorrow, who love and are loved by others, our attitudes will undergo a shift. From being engrossed in self-concern, we will extend our concern to others. From

seeking our own benefit, we will seek to benefit others. From being attached to our own beliefs, we will respect the right of others to hold their own beliefs, as long as these do not entail harm for others.

The work of Buddhist Global Relief is an attempt to put this principle into practice. Our projects are spread out across the world, from China through southern Asia and Africa to the Caribbean and the United States. Our decisions about which projects to implement are not governed by considering ethnicity or religion. We support followers of Buddhism, but also of Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, and Animism. We try to see our beneficiaries as more than mere statistics, objectified and codified, to see them as subjects of experience who deserve to thrive and flourish. We put special emphasis on helping women and girls, because they are too often the victims of oppressive systems, and too often their lives are treated as dispensable. Our focus is on food security because food is the key to life. But our projects also extend to education because it's education that provides a ladder up from poverty, and education that enriches people's minds so they can realize their potentials. Though the work of BGR is small scale, it is, we hope, a stepping stone toward a world order in which peace, harmony, and mutual respect will prevail among all peoples everywhere.

Food for Thought for Young Haitian Scholars A BGR Partner: The What If? Foundation



By Jennifer Russ - "You need an education to succeed," says seventeen-year-old Vanessa Petit-Homme, a tenth grade student in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

Polard Marie Guenthine, another tenth grader, agrees. "I don't know what I'd do without my education," she says. "It is so important to me."

If it weren't for a partnership between Buddhist Global Relief and the What If? Foundation, these two promising young scholars would not be able to attend school. Vanessa and Polard live in an unstable political situation in an impoverished country still reeling from an earthquake more than six years ago. Both girls' parents are poor, so they and their siblings rely on full scholarships from the What If? Foundation to continue attending school. In 2015, Buddhist Global Relief funded the educations of fifty students like Vanessa and Polard.

Since 2009, BGR has supported the What If? Foundation's hot lunch program, Lamanjay, which provides more than 1,200 meals daily to hungry children in the Ti Plas Kazo community. The What If? Foundation reports that 2015 was a particularly challenging year. The presidential election led to protests and demonstrations from August 2015 to January 2016, which were sometimes so heated they kept children at home from the lunch program. When the demonstrations cleared, children showed up extra hungry.

Thanks to the adaptive and innovative cooking team, however, the children who attended the lunch program were still well-fed. One eight-year-old boy, who said he was called "Estimable Emmanuel," told his interviewers that "this year was very good. I found food every day that I came to the program."

“Life is very hard for me without this food program,” Emmanuel said. “I don’t know what my family would do.”

The children of Haiti need support now more than ever. Even as protests have quieted, the World Food Program recently announced that due to a three-year- drought, Haiti is entering its worst food crisis in 15 years.



Delia, a seventeen-year-old student who has relied on the What If? Foundation’s scholarship program for five years, is confident that the foundation and its donors will continue to support the country’s children. “It is the best foundation I know,” she says. “They have never given up on the country or the people. We are so lucky that the donors keep donating money and giving us their attention so we can go to school.”

These scholarship students are not only dedicated and thankful, they are also determined to give back to their country. Vanessa Petit-Homme says she’d like to be a psychologist so she can help children in Haiti. “Life is not easy and children have so much stress. I would like to be there the way the What If? Foundation has been there for me.”

Delia says she wants to be an engineer. “I would love...to make my country more beautiful and construct strong buildings. That way I can help my country in its development.”

The What If? Foundation is also constructing strong buildings.

In January 2016, the foundation completed construction on their new school and cafeteria, which they hope will inspire optimism in the Ti Plas Kazo community and help its children “become part of the next generation of leaders.”

The children are as optimistic and dedicated as the organizations that support them. Delia says that to achieve her goals, she must “study hard and pray. If there was no What If? Foundation, I would not be able to continue with my studies.” To her donors, and to BGR, she says, “I thank you from the bottom of my heart.”

Jennifer Russ is a staff writer for BGR.

Why I Support the Work of BGR

By Ayya Santussika - I first learned about Buddhist Global Relief in 2010 when I attended a lecture by Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi. He and BGR Executive Director Kim Behan, while on tour in the Bay Area, gave a very moving presentation on BGR's work. I was touched by the story of how the organization was formed as a call to put Buddhist compassion into action to address the type of suffering that most deeply broke the hearts of Bhikkhu Bodhi and his students, chronic hunger and malnutrition. I was impressed with BGR's approach, seeking out projects that provided the greatest returns for donations, helping people rise out of deep poverty as well as sustaining them over difficult times, and staying closely connected to those implementing the projects on the ground.



In 2011, I co-organized the first BGR Walk to Feed the Hungry in California. Later that year I was invited to join BGR's board of directors. Since then, my involvement both as a board member and walk organizer has led to ever greater respect for this organization and its leadership. It is inspiring to witness how providing rice to families has kept teenage girls from being swept into the sex trade in Cambodia; how the introduction of more productive and sustainable farming methods has lifted poor farmers out of abject poverty in Africa, India and Southeast Asia; how nutritious meals and a chance for an education have changed the lives of children in Haiti, Bangladesh, Vietnam and elsewhere; and how right livelihood training for woman can affect whole villages and future generations right down the line.

There is a long list of amazing projects and moving stories, which when viewed from a broader perspective reveals BGR's work as a contribution towards an even loftier cause, that of a more level economic field and a more stable climate. Whether it's planting "trees that feed people" in Jamaica, educating girls and women in Nagpur, India, or introducing sustainable farming methods in Ethiopia, the movement is in the direction of restoring our natural systems, stabilizing world population growth, and improving local economies. I am grateful to be involved in these efforts and to be part of such a dedicated, high-integrity, all-volunteer team in doing so.

Ayya Santussika is founder and abbess of Karuna Buddhist Vihara in Mountain View, California, and a board member of Buddhist Global Relief.

BGR Jazz Concert to Feed the Hungry



By BGR Staff - On Saturday, April 9, 2016 at 7:00 pm., Buddhist Global Relief will hold its fifth Concert to Feed the Hungry, at the Middle Collegiate Church, 112 Second Avenue, New York, NY. Dedicated to the worldwide struggle against chronic hunger and malnutrition, the concert will feature Grammy-nominated pianist and composer [Fred Hersch](#), percussionist [Rogério Boccato](#), singer/songwriter [Becca Stevens](#), vocalist [Jean Rohe](#), and the Colombian folkloric ensemble [La Cumbiamba eNeYé](#). The concert is produced by saxophonist and BGR board member, [Dan Blake](#).

Funds raised from the concert will support BGR's many projects, which combat hunger worldwide, in regions ranging from Cambodia, India, and Bangladesh to Ethiopia and Cameroon to New York City. These projects not only provide direct food aid to people afflicted by poverty and disaster, but help farmers develop ecologically sustainable methods of food production, promote the education of poor girls, and give women the chance to earn more to support their families. Here in New York City, BGR supports a meal program for homeless youth and funds the development of urban gardens in communities with limited access to nutritious foods.

Middle Collegiate Church is a culturally diverse, inclusive and growing community of faith where all persons are welcomed just as they are as they come through the door. As a respected venue for the arts, the Church features an Arts in Activism and Education ministry team, comprised of lay leaders and professionals dedicated to expressing Middle's inclusive spiritual vision through daring artistic programming.

Seating is limited
Tickets are \$25/\$15 (with student ID)

To purchase securely or for more information, visit:
www.concerttofeedthehungry.org

FREE Livestream

Now you can [watch this concert](#) for free from almost anywhere in the world! All you'll need is a computer or smart device and internet access. Invite your friends to view with you!

Please also make a donation, so that you can help the hungry too!

Please join us for this evening of music dedicated to the struggle against chronic hunger and malnutrition. All proceeds support Buddhist Global Relief's projects for hunger relief, agriculture, education, and livelihood in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and the U.S.



How You Can Help BGR

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. 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 miroehm@buddhistglobalrelief.org for further information.

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

Buddhist Global Relief
2020 Route 301
Carmel NY 10512, USA

Thank you for your help!