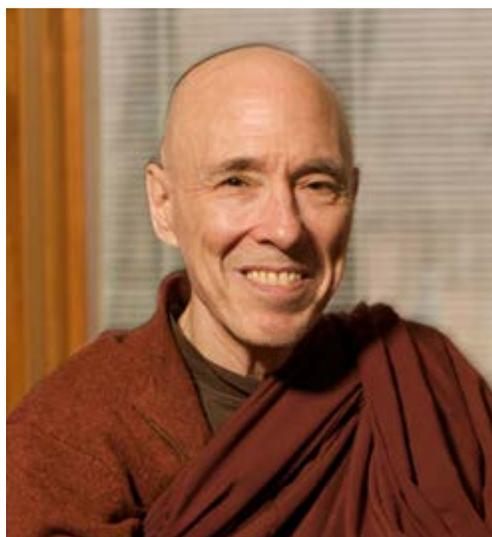




A Gift Not To Be Devalued



By Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi - The Buddha says that there are two kinds of gifts, the gift of material things and the gift of the Dhamma, and of these two, the gift of the Dhamma is foremost (Anguttara Nikaya 2:141). This saying has sometimes been used to devalue the gift of material things, and in some quarters it is cited to question the point of dedicating time and effort to uplifting people from poverty. Those who take this position maintain that because material goods are transient and unreliable, while the good obtained from practice of the Dhamma is imperishable, we should pass

over material gifts and focus our efforts solely on offering others the gift of the Dhamma, which alone leads to everlasting peace.

This argument, which would imply that the work of Buddhist Global Relief is ultimately fruitless, calls for a considered response. We might first point out that it overlooks the fact that the Buddha praises giving in all its forms, whenever the gift brings genuine benefit. He never underrates the importance of material gifts and especially emphasizes the gift of food. He says that if one knew the benefits of giving and sharing as he knows them, one would not eat without sharing one's food, even if one were down to one's last morsel. In a popular story, he hesitated to teach the Dhamma to a farmer who arrived late until the man had eaten, for he knew that it is hard for a hungry person to understand the teaching.

Such a reply, while cogent as far as it goes, is still not sufficient, for it is also necessary to take the context of the act of giving into account. When the Buddhist texts speak of the gift of material things, they generally do so with a situation in mind where the recipients are not

dependent upon any particular material gift for their survival. The texts view material gifts primarily as a present that friends might make to friends, or benefactors to those under their care, or as offerings that laypeople might make to religious mendicants – to “ascetics and brahmins” – out of respect for their way of life. In this latter case, which is the paradigm example of giving in the suttas, if the monk does not receive an offering from a prospective donor, he would not be faced with an existential crisis but would always have the option of going elsewhere. Any respectable monastic would easily find donors eager to ensure that his or her material needs are met.

In this picture, the gift of material things is not, for the recipient, a matter of life or death. The gift does not determine whether the recipient will flourish or sink; it does not mark the dividing line between living with dignity and falling into the pit of despair. The material gift serves primarily to demonstrate the lay community’s commitment to supporting renunciants and maintaining the monastic order that serves as their source of spiritual nourishment. The dominant spirit in which the gift is offered is that of joy and appreciation, not a concern to redeem the recipient from unbearable pain and anguish. The gift expresses a wish to support the recipients in their endeavor to lead the spiritual life undeflected by the clawing concerns of material subsistence.

In contrast, the kind of assistance that Buddhist Global Relief and other charities extend to the recipients of their grants makes a critical difference to the life chances of their ultimate beneficiaries. These are not so much gifts in the usual sense as lifesavers. Without such help the beneficiaries would likely be condemned to a life of unmitigated poverty plagued by illness, hunger, and a premature death. In such cases it has been the grant from BGR, channeled through our partners, that has truly made the vital difference between hope and despair, between a life of meaning and relentless misery.

Thus our partnership with Lotus Outreach has provided the opportunity, utterly unexpected, for a fatherless girl raised in a hut in Cambodia to finish high school, go on to college, and become an engineer. It is the grants that BGR has given to our partner in Haiti, the What If Foundation, that has provided meals to thousands of hungry children in Port-au-Prince after the earthquake of 2010, and a more recent grant that is now equipping a new school that will offer these children a decent education. And it is a project in Côte d’Ivoire, fully funded by BGR, that will enable our partner, Helen Keller International, to reduce childhood mortality by promoting optimal nutrition among pregnant women, nursing mothers, and infants.

While the ultimate good for Buddhism is nibbana, final release from the round of repeated birth and death, we should not let our understanding of the Dhamma—which for most of us is theoretical – blind us to the tangible types of bodily and mental suffering that ordinary people face due to poverty and oppressive social conditions. These types of suffering are bitter, painful, and debilitating. They can be almost as painful as death, and in many cases are actually forms of living death. If our sense of identity with others is sufficiently strong, we will be spurred to act to relieve their suffering as effortlessly as if moved by a reflex. Then all arguments against such activity, on the ground that it aims merely at promoting people’s temporal good, will sound hollow and pointless, and counter-arguments will be unnecessary. To liberate people from this kind of suffering is certainly a great blessing – a blessing for those who experience it, and also a blessing for those who make it possible.

A BGR Provides Emergency Donations to Help Syrian Refugees



A Syrian 2 year old baby Zehra and Eye Halip, who fled bombing in Aleppo, are seen with their mother Belkiz Halip at a tent city close to the Bab al-Salam border crossing on Turkish-Syrian border near Azaz town of Aleppo, Syria on February 11, 2016. Russian airstrikes have recently forced some 40,000 people to flee their homes in Syria's northern city of Aleppo. (Photo by Fatih Aktas/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images)

By BGR Staff - In late August, Buddhist Global Relief made emergency donations of \$5,000 each to two respected aid organizations assisting refugees fleeing from the fighting in Syria. One is Oxfam America; the other is CARE. Driven from their homes, many families daily risk their lives in a dangerous flight for safety. Millions of refugees from Syria and other Middle Eastern countries—many of them children—travel long distances to other lands where they hope to find a place of safety and refuge. Hundreds of thousands of displaced people, both within Syria and outside, are in critical need of adequate food, shelter, healthcare, and warm clothes.

BGR's donations to CARE and Oxfam will:

- Deliver food baskets, baby items, and other emergency essentials to families cut off from supplies.
- Provide access to clean water, including water purification tablets for individual families.
- Increase access to health care for pregnant women and communities affected by conflict.

Readers who wish to help Syrian refugees should contribute directly to these two organizations, or to other organizations with a similar mission, rather than to Buddhist Global Relief.

Using Less To Get More: Crop Intensification in Ethiopia



By BGR Staff - The Central Rift Valley is Ethiopia's predominant vegetable production belt. In this region, there are over 20,000 smallholder farmers engaged in producing over 200,000 tons of vegetables per year on about 10,000 hectares of irrigated land. Despite access to irrigation, agricultural practices have remained traditional, irregular, and unsustainable in terms of their economic, social, environmental, and ecological impacts. The agronomic practice and input application patterns are not only haphazard but also cause significant damage to the soil, water, ecology, and human health. During our fiscal years 2015 and 2016, BGR partnered with Oxfam America on a two-year project to increase the productivity of vegetable crops (tomato and onion) by teaching farmers the System of Crop Intensification (SCI). Two farmers who participated in the project are Esmile Johar, a 42-year-old father of four, and Rukia, a mother.

About ten years ago, Esmile and most of the surrounding farmers worked as laborers on their own land. Remembering the hard times, Esmile explained: “We had to rent our land to rich investors who had money to buy irrigation pumps, and inputs such as seeds, fertilizers and pesticides. We didn't have the necessary tools or know how. So our only choice was to rent our land and work for them as daily laborers.”

Things started changing when development agencies and the government introduced measures to enable smallholder farmers to use their land to overcome poverty and improve their livelihoods. Among them was Oxfam and a local organization, SEDA (Sustainable Environment and Development Action). Oxfam and SEDA began their partnership in 2000 with a focus on small-scale irrigation for vegetable production in the Central Rift Valley. More recently, Oxfam and SEDA have collaborated on introducing an innovative agricultural methodology called the System of Crop Intensification (SCI), which promotes efficient, climate-smart techniques to increase productivity and reduce costs for two major vegetables – onions and tomatoes.

To reach more farmers and encourage peer-to-peer learning, a “five to one ratio” structure was established whereby one demonstrator would try to reach five followers. In the BGR initiative, 50 demonstrators and 250 followers were selected to learn and practice SCI. Esmile was selected to be a demonstrator. Looking at his one-eighth hectare backyard covered with onion seedlings, tomato, carrot, cabbage, lettuce, turnip green, collard green, papaya, avocado, coffee, and banana, it is not hard to imagine why he was selected.



Rukia was another person selected to be a demonstrator. Surrounded by onion seedlings in her backyard, she said with a smile: “I was confident I could do it, and proud to be selected. For a long time I learned new ways of doing things by following others. So I was very happy to teach others. It is a proof how far I have come.”

Throughout the trial period the five followers worked closely with the demonstrators. The setup encouraged mutual learning where they continually shared knowledge, ideas, and experiences. At the end of three months, the farmers were very happy and quite surprised with the outcome of the experiments.

“I knew the research will improve my productivity but didn’t expect this much,” Esmile said with a smile. “Even though I used almost half of the seed and fertilizer and only watered the onions two days instead of five, my yield doubled compared to the traditional method.” His children are healthy and eating a balanced diet, he has a better and bigger house, a comfortable bed to sleep on, a bicycle for his son to go to school, and so on.

Rukia too is very happy with the result. From her backyard plot she got almost three kilos of onion. Rukia is investing in her children’s education and intends to apply what she learned to her half hectare of land nearby. Her backyard is already covered with second round onion seedlings following the new SCI method she learned.



Based on a report provided to BGR by Oxfam America. Photos courtesy of Oxfam America.

The Combined Federal Campaign



By BGR Staff - The Combined Federal Campaign, the only authorized workplace giving program for US federal government employees, is now in full swing. Non-profits are allowed to apply for participation if they demonstrate a high level of fiscal transparency and accountability. We are proud that BGR has once again been accepted for participation in the CFC, and grateful to the many federal employees who dedicate a portion of their paychecks to helping the less fortunate!

We want to encourage all our readers who are federal employees, or know someone who is a federal employee, to explore this opportunity for giving. It is a wonderful way to give consistently by having a small deduction taken from your paycheck that is sent to BGR.

This program has already brought in \$28,000 to benefit the needy around the world. Just imagine, a little over \$300 is enough to feed an orphan in Bangladesh for a year, and less than \$200 will train a farmer in Sudan to increase their production by 20%!

This year we are working through **Charities Without Borders** to increase our visibility in federal workplaces.

Please consider giving to BGR through CFC # 74375 this fall!

BGR at World Humanitarian Summit



Interfaith Prayer

By Sylvie Sun - In my role as a board member for Buddhist Global Relief, I was invited to attend a meeting on March 23, 2016, convened by the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Religion and Development. The coordinator, Dr. Azza Karam, the senior advisor of the UN's Population Fund (UNFPA), and Mr. Ulrich Nitschke introduced the newly launched International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development

(PaRD), which a number of governments jointly created with a view to facilitating realization of the UN's newly created Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This was followed on March 29, 2016 by a meeting of the Religious Resourcing for Humanitarian Work on "Preparing for the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) Special Session on Religious Engagement," a day-long conference hosted by UNFPA. This informal policy roundtable included UN chief of staff and faith-based representatives, who came together to share their experiences and insights in preparation for the WHS in May.

In April, BGR received an invitation from Mr. Ulrich Nitschke of PaRD to provide information about BGR's humanitarian work to present at WHS. With help from Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, George Clapp, Carla Prater, David Braughton and Kim Behan, I submitted project reports, financial reports, photos, videos and PowerPoint presentations of the Haiti projects that we support in partnership with the What If Foundation. A most patient, tireless and amazing friend, Ms. Heike Wülfing of the PaRD/GIZ Bonn office, wrote an inspiring story of the Haiti project for the PaRD bulletin. BGR was selected to be included at the Religious Engagement in Humanitarian Crises: Good Practice Collection launched during the first World Humanitarian Summit, Special Session: Religious Engagement on May 23, 2016 in Istanbul, Turkey: <https://www.worldhumanitariansummit.org>.

It has been BGR's core values and principles that guide our volunteers and staff. As part of our good practice, we use donations efficiently, effectively, and transparently to expand and enrich our projects, and we keep overhead costs minimal so 90% of donated funds go directly toward projects. We respect the people we serve, as well as their customs, beliefs, and traditions when

we collaborate with partners and local communities with sustainable and resilient projects to empower women, children, and vulnerable communities.

Most religious people who practice goodness and service have a significant impact to their communities. Hence, the importance of interfaith dialogue and partnership that lead to develop a more peaceful and sustainable world is demanded. At this evening event, BGR was introduced to participants at its best practices session by Mr. Ulrich Nitschke. I was extremely honored to be the Buddhist representative helping to lead the prayer with leaders representing their respective Hindu, Muslim, Jewish and Catholic faiths.



The author with Mr. Ulrich Nitschke, Ms. Azza Karam, H.H. Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswati, Sadhvi Bhagawati Saraswati & Rabbi Awraham Soetendorp

Since this was to be my first visit to Istanbul, Carla Prater and Dan Blake reached out immediately to connect me with their friends in Istanbul to make sure I was safe and well taken care of once I arrived. Carla's friend and student, Ahmet Altiner, did not let his teacher down. He and his wife, Dehen, accompanied me from the time I landed in Istanbul until I departed this historical city. I am forever grateful to them for their friendship.

Sylvie Sun is a board member of BGR and chair of the Fundraising Committee.

BGR Participates in Half a Million Meals Event on 9/11



By Regina Valdez - This past Sunday, September 11th, marked the 15th anniversary of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. It also marked the 14th anniversary of the organization *9/11 Day*, founded by David Paine and Jay Winuk, whose brother Glenn, a lawyer and volunteer firefighter, lost his life while trying to rescue people stuck in the Twin Towers. Today, nearly a third of Americans participate in some type of charitable service on 9/11, making it the single largest annual day of social and charitable engagement in America.

On this day Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, members of Buddhist Global Relief, and others from the Buddhist community joined over 2,000 other volunteers on Manhattan's Pier 36 to pack meals for the city's hungry. Working together in assembly-line fashion, the groups prepared over half a million kits containing well-balanced meals, which were sent to food pantries throughout the city and distributed directly to those in need. Surprising as it may seem, hunger is a daily companion for many New Yorkers. Beneath the city's gleaming towers of architectural might, as many as 25% of New York's children live in households that are deemed food insecure. With the cost of living so high, many families are simply unable to both keep a roof over their heads and sufficient food in their cupboards.



An interfaith service preceded the packing, with representatives from the Christian, Islamic, Buddhist, and Jewish faiths. Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, representing the Buddhist contingent, emphasized the importance of solidarity, which he explained as “the connection of our own heart with those who suffer.” He added that “one of the most degrading, debilitating forms of suffering is hunger and malnutrition,” reminding us of Buddhist Global Relief’s primary mission: fighting chronic hunger and malnutrition around the world.

Photos by James Mora.

Regina Valdez is a volunteer for Buddhist Global Relief based in New York City

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 info@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!