

BODHI TIMES

Benevolent Organisation for Development, Health & Insight (BODHI)

June, 2003

No. 24

We aim sustainably to improve health, education and the environment in developing countries by providing a hook, not a fish. BODHI was founded in 1989 on the principle of skillful, compassionate action. BODHI is neither religious nor political. We have supporters and advisers from many faiths. We encourage your support, ideas and acts of kindness. Realizing the interdependence of all beings is in our enlightened self-interest. If we don't work together to reduce the world's much discussed problems, then who will?

Two images and ...



The pilgrim in Tibet and two tribesmen in Burma come courtesy of Luke Duggleby. (The constraints of printing this newsletter inexpensively don't do these justice. See website for full, colour versions.) Luke, an English photojournalist, wanted to document the Revolving Sheep Bank in western Tibet. Unfortunately, the area is inaccessible to Westerners. Luke writes, "I really appreciate your help. Surviving as a photojournalist isn't the easiest thing in the world and it's just really nice when people genuinely try to help you. It makes a great change from all the negative snobbery in the industry. Thank you."

BODHI supporter Dr. Geoffrey Cohn, of Australia, and his ophthalmologic team are volunteering in Burma. He writes: "The work is entirely done by the local experts. We support efficiency drives and teaching of triage, as well as offering super-speciality input in order to upgrade their skills. Wahchet Hospital is a creation of the monastic community, but available at minimal or zero cost to the entire community of Myanmar. The staff revel in the restoration of sight, the abolition of double vision and the recovery of a cosmetically acceptable appearance by the many young victims of agricultural and industrial trauma.

"The cataract operation costs about A\$25, the strabismus A\$10, the orbital reconstruction A\$10 and the brown-iris eye prosthesis A\$8. The hospital has no constant funding, relying on donors. We are such, as are our Australian friends and grateful patients. The surgeons are donating five days a week to do the work, and we hope for more." Let us know if you'd like to contact Dr. Cohn.

... a way to see them



Above: Pilgrim, nr. Zoige, N. Sichuan Province. Below: 2 men from the Pa-O tribe at a weekly market nr. Kalaw, Shan State. Both taken with permission. Right: Working without electricity. Photo: Dr. G. Cohn, who notes the seamless transition to the torch and "triumph of the human spirit, epitomizing Burma."

The future is not another country

The future has long been an obsession. As a child, I dreamt about living in the year 2000. What a milestone! At that time, the 21st century seemed not without doubt and fear, but I felt optimistic. I looked forward to the science fiction stuff. But in the last two decades a different scenario has emerged, far darker than those in the books of my childhood.

I have long worried about World War III. In 1966 (aged 11), I remember wondering if WWII was about to start, because it was then 21 years since WWII had ended, the same period that separated the first two global wars. The Korean War, the Pugwash movement, McCarthyism, the Cuban missile crisis, the assassination of Martin Luther King (probably state-sanctioned; see *An Act of State*, by William Pepper), the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal bled into a shared and common sense of apprehension, culminating in the 1980s. My apprehension diminished during the Reagan-Gorbachev meeting in Reykjavík, Iceland, and relaxed further by the ending of the Cold War.

But in my mind, more fundamental drivers of conflict remained unaddressed. Global population was then about five billion, climate change had emerged as a legitimate issue, and the fragile upward trajectory of much of Africa was clearly reversing. I didn't know it at the time, but, under the influence of the Reagan administration, the U.S. National Academy of Science (NAS) had just published a major report into the issue of population growth rates and its potential to influence economic "takeoff." Despite vigorous, but minority dissent, the NAS report surprisingly concluded that population growth was unimportant for development, thus overturning not only the conclusions of an earlier NAS report (1971), but the wisdom of a whole generation of development economists.

Flycatcher wisdom

The 1986 NAS report helped to legitimize the reduction in foreign aid (including for family planning) that followed the election of President Reagan (another of Reagan's decisions was to remove the solar cells from the White House, installed by his

predecessor). It also helped to shift George Bush Senior from his previous view. Following a lineage that included Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon and Carter, the elder Bush had also once thought that population mattered. In 2001, Birdsall et al. published *Population Matters*, a book which goes a long way to restoring this older wisdom, once commonplace among demographers.

Population also matters to other species. For example, researchers of the collared flycatcher, in Sweden, have observed that these birds observe both the number and condition of nestlings in their potential neighbours' nests, before deciding whether to settle. If the neighbours are doing well, settlement is desired; if not, they will move on (*Science*, 2002, **297**:1168-71).

What (I hope) seems common sense to the reader was apparently not as clear to the compilers of the NAS report, nor to the current Australian Minister for immigration, who is on record as saying that human carrying capacity is a meaningless concept. But how different is the assessment of the human to that of the flycatcher? Why are there no long immigration queues seeking settlement in Rwanda?

Global population forecast

The most recent report of the UN Population Division (2002) has again reduced the medium estimate of peak global human population, from 9.3 to 8.9 billion, a downward revision of 400 million. Quite a drop in the two years since its previous estimate. Watch this space for further downward revisions, as humans collectively realize that their living standard, and perhaps survival, depends on not converting every last scrap of nature into something which humans can use.

However, the rapid decline in global population growth rates is not all good news. Quite a bit is explained by an "irruptive" pattern, that is a zigzagged pattern of population boom and bust, especially in parts of sub-Saharan Africa, because of HIV/AIDS. In Rwanda, James Gasana, former Rwandan minister for agriculture, recently noted that,

in fact, overpopulation was a factor in the Rwandan genocide.

West Africa, oil and ethnic conflict

I'm writing this during the early stages of the battle for Baghdad. I suppose the invading force will soon control Iraq. But almost unnoticed, last night's news mentioned that oil production in Nigeria has been halved because of "ethnic conflict." In 2001, more than 500 people were killed in Jos (the capital of Plateau state, once optimistically dubbed by the Nigerian minister for tourism as the "Switzerland of Nigeria"). I lived in Jos in 1985, and my memory is of a rather sleepy, dusty town.

However, as resource pressure and expectations increase, the large and disgruntled population of Nigeria, long misruled, might yet follow the trajectory of southern Africa, though probably its higher rate of male circumcision will impede the penetration of HIV/AIDS (no space to discuss that here, I'm afraid!). Côte d'Ivoire, considered a model West African state, is in an even worse condition than Nigeria, having suddenly passed an undesirable threshold, triggered in part by an attempt to change the electoral rule to disadvantage recent settlers.

Sudden shifts

This concept of threshold changes (e.g., water turning to ice at freezing point) is commonplace in nature, and indeed human experience (for example phrases such as the "last straw" and "the weakest link."). Every riot policeman must have a gut understanding of thresholds. Yet, perhaps because the mathematics is more difficult, non-linearities are curiously absent from most forms of social science. This is an almost crippling intellectual deficiency, which must surely soon be corrected.

It is adverse thresholds that most worry me. Whether related to crop yields and climate, population pressure and conflict, or mosquito density and the emergence of malaria, threshold effects are ubiquitous, yet, usually better recognized in retrospect. But thresholds can also bring positive change, and if we are lucky, a threshold effect may yet save us, including from WWII. (References on request.)

Late-breaking news

We regret that Tenpa TK resigned his position as BODHI's India Field Representative on March 31. We thank him and wish him well. Of the Mass Health Awareness Campaign Tenpa writes, "From the general pattern of inflow of patients at the hospital, it is evident that people have understood what we have said and more important they have been trying to practice what they see now as healthy habits. Because of these, we have much less number of diarrheal patients. People are generally talking about hypertension, diabetes, especially the middle aged and the elderly and come for regular check ups. They always have many questions to ask our staff about general health issues and diseases. They have new found faith in our hospital and staff. The general environment in the settlement has changed considerably. People do think twice before they dirty any public place ... This is more than I expected." Story and photos in next newsletter.

Letters to the Editor

A U.S. supporter expressed concern that BODHI's Medical Director is drawing parallels between them and the Taliban and Nazis: "I took some offense to comparing the USA to Nazi Germany ... In regards to the U.S. being so far out of step with the rest of the world, I am troubled by the double standard of condemnation against U.S. policy and the silence or at best mild whimpering of other nations at the atrocities carried out by ruthless racist murderous misogynist regimes in the Middle East. As I recently told a friend going to demonstrate against U.S. involvement in Iraq, 'Speak your conscience, but why are you silent on murder and torture by the thousands; why are you silent on murderous suicide bombers, when these are committed by Islamists? And how do you blame the U.S. for this same cultural behavior 1000 years ago with the death of perhaps millions of innocents by men who believe they are doing the work of their god and will be rewarded in heaven?' I am not gaining any popularity with the vast majority of my friends, who lean to the left. My problem is I am a student of history. I cannot ignore the lessons of history and climb on the bandwagon of blaming the U.S. for all the world problems."

Colin clarifies: *I apologize for a possible misunderstanding in my last column. In that, I compared the U.S. to the Taliban and the Nazis, in one respect only. All three seem to have difficulties tolerating shades of gray, instead exhibiting a kind of binary thinking (see Egan and Glover in Collateral Language). I wish to clarify that these comments apply to the current U.S. administration, not the entire U.S. population!! I agree that the U.S. has no monopoly on harmful policies and that we should speak out wherever we can in defence of human rights.*

Shelley Anderson writes from Amsterdam: "Ironically, it seems the closer people were to Ground Zero, the less the desire for revenge there was/is: witness the families of victims of the WTC assaults who travelled to Afghanistan to talk with families of victims of U.S. bombing, or the large peace movement within New York City. I read that for several months after September 11, the Qu'ran was on the NY Times best sellers list; some people were trying to understand the why behind the attacks. A friend in the Brooklyn told me this story: there are many Muslim immigrants in her neighborhood. A few days after the attack, a local neighborhood house noticed that Muslim women wearing head scarves were keeping their kids home from school, rather than risk being attacked on the way to school. The neighborhood house sent out a call for volunteers to accompany Muslim parents and kids walking to school. Twelve hundred people volunteered in one day.

"And there has been the opposite effect: more fear, more paranoia; digging deeper into isolation and the mistaken belief that somehow Americans can be exempt from the world's suffering—some of which is directly created by U.S. government policies.

"Anyway, BODHI's work is more important than ever."

Another US supporter writes: "Bush is worse than his father. We are getting more of our rights taken away from us as they are erasing the Bill or Rights. Because of 9-11 we could find ourselves in a dictatorship."

Sheep Bank meets U.S. Gov TPA criteria

U.S. President George W. Bush signed the Tibetan Policy Act (TPA) into law as part of the Foreign Relations Authorization Act for Fiscal Years 2002 and 2003 (H.R. 1646). The TPA was introduced in May 2001 as S. 852 by Senators Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) and Craig Thomas (R-WY) and as H.R. 1779 by Congressmen Tom Lantos (D-CA) and Mark Kirk (R-IL). They were joined by 123 co-sponsors, almost a quarter of the United States Congress (*Tibetan Bulletin*, 6:3,02).

BODHI's Revolving Sheep Bank meets all nine criteria for economic development projects of the TPA's Sec. 616(d). See website for details.

New Literacy and Library Projects

We're supporting another adult literacy project in NE India, in a remote village called Mupyut. "It's very remote and poor," writes Dr. Ghonglah. Details in next newsletter.

Sometimes even the smallest projects have unexpected benefits. Tim Jenkinson donated the entire Scotch Oakburn Boarder's Library of 300+ books to make way for a new library. Mike Hancock and Charlotte King of Gowrie Park, Tasmania, bought the books for A\$150 for local families who home-school. Other donations brought the total to A\$162. For that miniscule amount, BODHI brought together two groups in the community whose paths would not otherwise cross. The cash donation will form the basis of a library for the Sohbar Literacy Project in NE India.

Thank You

John Bell, Tasmania, Australia
Charles Chadwick, Tasmania, Australia
Prof. Kim McQuaid, Ohio, USA
James Meyers, California, USA
Katherine Whitman, California, USA

Thanks to **David Butler**, Australia, for secretarial help and to **Tim Jenkinson** and the **boarders** at Scotch Oakburn College, Launceston, Tasmania for donating their library to BODHI.

Small but Useful

Claire Jacob and three other French medical students are volunteering this northern summer in Bylakuppe, India. Claire says that big aid organisations don't take the time to answer. She's requested practical advice about nurse training, medical equipment and preventative medicine, and says, "The big associations are difficult to contact and seem to consider that our work is completely uninteresting and not useful. Which is probably true but it is what we can do with our level."

We need your help

Thanks to your generosity, BODHI has supported many exciting and innovative projects, such as continuing education for remote health workers, literacy (a key to better health) and a micro-credit scheme for Tibetan nomads.

To continue, we need your help. Please send your donation, payable in U.S. or Australian dollars, to an address below.

Contact us for details of **direct-debit facilities**.

Donations by U.S. and Australian tax-payers are tax-deductible

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How do you help people facing grave injustices to develop compassion in action? This was the challenge

facing myself and the Buddhist non-violence trainer Ouyporn Khuankaew, when we were asked to lead an advanced nonviolence training for Cambodian activists in August 2002. This was to follow up on a non-violence training Ouyporn and I had co-facilitated in Phnom Penh in the year 2000. That training involved a challenging mix of 19 university students, mostly younger women, and five illiterate older Buddhist nuns. The participants belonged to two very different social groups that seldom interacted. The advanced training, too, brought together groups that seldom mixed: university students from the urban centre of Cambodia's capital, Phnom Penh, and villagers from some of Cambodia's poorest provinces.

The request to help facilitate the advanced training was exciting for several reasons. Since the first nonviolence training, the university students had been conducting their own trainings. They called themselves the Women Peace Makers group, and first aided girls in factories in the capital who were organizing for better working conditions. They then learned of villagers in rural areas who were struggling non-violently to stop illegal logging or land grabbing, and began to reach out to those communities. The advanced training would be a wonderful opportunity to learn more about these struggles, which seldom receive any attention from the international community.

Bringing the Temple to the Streets

Many of the participants were surprised during our first training in Cambodia when we talked about Cambodia's own long history of active nonviolence, citing the example in particular of Maha Ghosananda, Cambodia's Supreme Patriarch. In 1987 Maha Ghosananda led a group of Buddhists monks and nuns to the United Nations-sponsored peace talks in Indonesia. There he told all the fighting factors that he would form a fifth army, an army of peace whose ammunition would be bullets of loving kindness.' Since 1992 thousands of nuns, monks and lay people have joined Maha Ghosananda's annual peace marches throughout Cambodia, called Dhammayietras. The first Dhammayietra played a very important role in de-escalating the atmosphere of violence during Cambodia's first election. They have helped spread the values of non-violence and compassion, and spread life-saving information on landmines, AIDS and the need to stop deforestation.

Participants expected to hear instead about new, Western ideas on conflict resolution. But non-violence, sometimes translated in Asia as *ahimsa* or *non-harming*, is evident in every culture and is as old as humanity. One aim of nonviolence training is to promote awareness of the values and resources that make for a culture of peace and nonviolence in the participants' own culture. This was especially important in Cambodia, where the scars of war remain unhealed.

In the 1990s Buddhist groups, such as the U.S.-based Buddhist Peace Fellowship and



BODHI adviser at work

Non-violence in Cambodia

the Thailand-based International Network of Engaged Buddhists, helped to rebuild Buddhism by bringing in teaching materials on the Dharma and by supporting the education of Cambodian monks and nuns. Today, in a Cambodia where both politics and the courts are corrupt, the ordained sangha is one of the few social institutions ordinary people trust.

Compassion in Action

Buddhism was obviously an important tool that the 39 participants in the advanced training could use. We encouraged participants to use the Four Noble Truths in the training session on ways to analyze a conflict. First, identify the conflict, then look at the causes of the conflict. Then realize that solutions to the conflict are possible. This third truth could not be over-estimated, because it is the basis of hope. There is mass corruption in Cambodian society. The rich, who may make their money from drugs, prostitution, or the exploitation of Cambodia's dwindling natural resources, often bribe officials, while the poor can be picked up and thrown into jail at the whim of police. There was brutalization on a mass scale during the Khmer Rouge years. The trauma remains and violence is still common in Cambodia. Maintaining hope in such a situation is no small feat.

The fourth step in conflict analysis based on the Four Noble Truths involves identifying concrete ways to a solution. Tools to help the participants discover the ways to find just solutions to social problems were explored. Many skits and practical exercises were held during the six-day training. They were all based on practical problems that the participants faced in their everyday lives. These problems included how to continue a non-violent struggle after the villagers first action had failed; how to encourage people to try nonviolent methods rather than violence; and how to continue a nonviolent struggle even after the leaders have been killed.

The villagers, and the students who supported them, faced imprisonment. Corrupt police would be paid to put them in jail or to beat them up. The deep belief in Buddhism gave some of the participants the courage to continue their struggles in the face of such massive odds. One of the participants was an older man, the leader of a village. In his village people made their living from fishing. But businesses were threatening their

livelihood. Illegal trawlers were fishing in the traditional areas, capturing or killing all the fish. After their many complaints to the police were ignored, the villagers confiscated the trawlers, carefully explaining to the trawler crews why they were doing this.

The businessman, who refused to meet with the villagers, filed a court case claiming they had destroyed his property. He also threatened to kill some of the villagers. This was no idle threat: in some villagers there are many widows whose husbands have been killed after protesting about illegal fishing.

During the training, the village leader said, "The Buddha teaches us that everything will change. He teaches us that we all will die.

So why should I be afraid of being killed? Since I will die, I would rather die for something important, rather than for something unimportant." The entire room full of participants clapped and cheered this statement.

In addition to tools such as deep listening, and conflict analysis, Ouyporn and I encouraged the participants to cultivate meditation. This tool to help cultivate inner peace would support the activists when dealing with the inevitable strong emotions of anger and fear. Every day we would begin by sitting in silence. Many participants had never meditated before. They were awkward at first, shifting uneasily on the bamboo matting which covered the floor.

After each silent sitting, we invited questions. "Why concentrate on the breath?" "Why do my thoughts constantly go back to my boyfriend, who made me very sad?" "My back hurts; am I doing something wrong?" "Why do you ring a bell; the meditation teacher at my temple never does this?" were some of the questions.

Ouyporn and I shared our experiences with meditation, and repeated why it is important for activists to be still and reflective. Meditation is a tool as useful as conflict analysis models or any other organizing skill, we said. It can help us develop the inner strength to continue the struggle for peace even when everything and everyone around us says to give up.

This inner strength was especially important for the women in the training. Although women are now 60 percent of the population, because so many men and boys were killed by the Khmer Rouge, women have little power or respect in Cambodian society. The women students (who form a minority in the country, as only 14 percent of university students are female) talked about family pressure to give up their studies and social change work, in order to marry. Some participants cried when they also told how some villagers assume the women students must be prostitutes, because how else could a woman be free to travel from the city to the countryside?

Excerpted from an article available on our website. Shelley Anderson coordinates the Women Peacemakers Program of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, Spoorstraat 38, 1815 BK Alkmaar, the Netherlands Email: s.anderson@ifor.org Web: www.ifor.org/awpp

Photo: Women Peacemakers Program Archives, IFOR