

BODHI TIMES

December, 1999 No. 17

Benevolent Organisation for Development, Health & Insight (BODHI)

NOMADS, SHEEP & BOOKS

BODHI hopes to enter the new millennium with a bang, or should we say a baa. We are trying to put together an economic self-sufficiency project, a Revolving Sheep Bank, for nomads in western Tibet. Donor money would purchase ewes from other nomads and then lend these to poor nomad families who would repay the loan, via the offsprings' offspring, after four or five years.

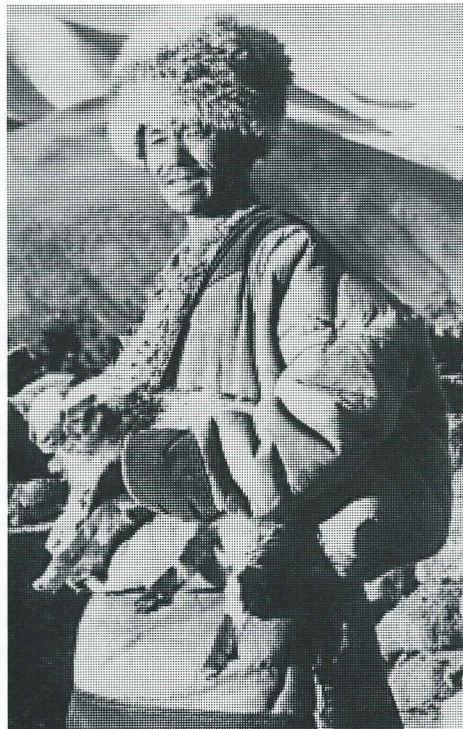
Pastoralists comprise roughly one-quarter of the Western Tibet's total population. "Since the disbandment of the pastoral communes in the early 1980s and the introduction of the household responsibility system, a serious problem in pastoralist areas has been the emergence of a stratum of impoverished nomad households," writes Professor Melvyn Goldstein. "These poor nomad households own only a few livestock (less than 30 head) and subsist mainly from welfare from the local administrative area (xiang) government. The local governments have been unable to garner the resources needed assist these families to improve their economic status and rise above the poverty level."

SOLUTION TO POVERTY

Prof. Goldstein and Dr. Cynthia Beall conducted a longitudinal research project from 1986-1997 in two nomadic pastoral areas in Nabrang district (west of Xigatse and Lhatse), which convinced them that a cost-effective solution to the problem of the long-term poverty of a segment of the Tibetan nomad population existed.

The proposal would allow poor families to keep all products (offspring, milk, wool, butter and cheese) from the borrowed sheep and require them to repay the same number of fertile female sheep. "This approach will ensure that this aid is not a one-time grant to

temporarily help families, but rather will allow recipient households to attain economic self-sufficiency. It is also a way to establish a self-perpetuating animal bank in the area that would be able to continue to assist needy families indefinitely," Goldstein says.



Nomad and lambs in western Tibet

Photo: Beall/Goldstein

The project would provide funds to the xiang to purchase 300 young ewes in years 1-4, totalling 1200. Five poor nomad households would receive sixty ewes, purchased from richer nomads in the same area. "Households will repay half of their loan in year 4 in ewes (without interest), and half in year 5. From year 5, the sheep bank will be receiving 300 ewe per year so will be completely self-sufficient," Goldstein says, adding, "This level of payback is possible

because sheep reproduce quickly. Newborn sheep get pregnant in their second year and give birth in their third year. Thus, even assuming 10% annual mortality of adult sheep and 30% annual mortality of lambs, at the end of five years the revolving bank would be repaid in full from the first year's loan and each household would have roughly 100-125 sheep left (plus income from the wool and skins of dead sheep). The sheep bank would continue to lend to needy families, and the five original families would have reached lower middle-income level subsistence."

The local xiang will provide administration. Inflation will not be a problem, because the repayments will involve sheep (of a similar age to that granted) rather than cash. At this stage we are proposing to not charge interest, because the xiang will meet any ongoing administration costs. It is important to realize that this project is not simply welfare. The nomads will be required to make their repayments in sheep, thus enabling the project to continue. We hope, if successful, to extend this project to other areas. If we do this project, it will be our biggest ever. Details in the next newsletter.

LIBRARIES & SCHOOL MATERIALS

Village children in remote areas in Tibet need Tibetan-Tibetan dictionaries and school notebooks. Transportation costs are high; supplying each village costs US\$1000/AS\$1350.

Rural schools in Tibet also need libraries. We're looking at two levels of schools: village (grades 1-3) and xiang (the next highest administrative level) (grades 1-6). Library costs include books, transportation (10-20% of the total) and bookshelves (three for the

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ENTITLEMENT

The last *Medical Director's Desk* generated an unusual amount of correspondence. First, I want to clarify that Gandhi was a *nonviolent* fighter against the British.

Second, my description of colonization of the Americas from across the Bering Strait 12-15,000 years ago, though still the dominant academic view, is increasingly questioned (see, for example: Roger Lewin: "Young Americans," *New Scientist*: 17.10.98; pp. 24-28).

Amartya Sen received this year's Nobel Prize for Economics, partly for including food entitlement in his explanation of famine. Food entitlement means that we may acquire food by growing, bartering or paying for it. Food availability does not always equal food entitlement. For example, Sen showed that total food availability in 1943—in which a famine in Bengal killed 3 million people—was greater than in 1941, when there was no famine. Sen describes how the starving rural poor came to Calcutta to die in front of well stocked food shops, guarded by the state.

The Great Hunger in mid-nineteenth century Britain illustrates a similar phenomenon. The Irish poor died not because there was no food but because they couldn't afford the more expensive grain, desperately needed after the potato crop failed. Both the Bengali and Irish poor were among the disentitled.

THE DISENTITLED

Entitlement enables us to generate effective demand. A starving individual needs food, but need alone does not constitute economic demand. Economic discussions of supply and demand imply, but very rarely state, the adjective "effective." Thus, despite its devastating epidemic of HIV/AIDS, demand from sub-Saharan Africa for anti-viral drugs remains tiny.

The global distribution of many environmental goods is skewed. Over 1 billion people have no access to clean water and have poor hygiene. Air pollution renders some cities in China invisible from spacecraft at night. Children are deprived of seeing stars. Many will die of lung disease. These people lack effective environmental demand. Like the Bengalis and Irish, they are disentitled.

SEE 1

By sustainable environmental entitlement (SEE) (type 1), I mean humankind's ability to generate effective demand in order to inhabit an Earth not irreversibly damaged by human actions. Those with insufficient SEE 1 will continue to live indefinitely in a degraded environment. They do not pose a direct security risk to the population with adequate entitlement, provided any social instability arising from their poverty can be quarantined.

SEE 2

I define SEE (type 2) as the ability for oneself and one's descendants to inhabit an Earth which has not been irreversibly damaged by human actions *and thus remains a place able to sustain an advanced level of global civilization, at least equivalent to that experienced at present*. Many policy makers discount the possibility that our civilization may deteriorate in the future. However, I argue that ecological factors increase the risk of civilization failure (CF). "CF" is deterioration in civilization's ability to function, analogous to the medical term "organ failure" and the economic term "market failure." Neither necessarily implies total loss of function.

If significant parts of the global population inhabit pockets where civilization is clearly deteriorating, can the rest of the world remain unaffected? Civilization temporarily fails during genocide, earthquake or war, but can be restored. If infrastructure is damaged, repairs can be made using resources from other areas. If, perhaps for ecological reasons, resources in other areas are also becoming scarce, then the damaged part of civilization cannot be fixed quickly.

BARBARIANIZATION

If the process continues, barbarianization may result. An increasing number of economists, ecologists, political scientists and futurists consider this pessimistic scenario plausible. Ecological factors arguably contributed to the demise of at least three early civilizations: Sumerian, Mayan and Easter Island. Is our civilization invulnerable?

The pathways to CF are likely to involve the interaction of ecological, economic and social stresses, leading to conflict. Initially

localized, such conflicts could become global. One possible trigger is the predicted change in the distribution of global agricultural productivity due to climate change. Some areas will gain but others may lose, particularly in heavily populated South Asia.

HURRICANES

Two recent examples illustrate how natural damage might contribute to CF. Hurricane Floyd caused the evacuation of several million people from the East coast of the U.S. and triggered alarm at Cape Canaveral, forcing the space shuttles into their hangers for protection. In late October, one of the century's worst cyclones struck the Indian state of Orissa, affecting up to 15 million people. Had the cyclone, with winds up to 250 kph/155 mph, occurred on the U.S. Eastern Seaboard, then the hangars would have been powerless to protect their shuttles.

The costs to the global insurance industry from a devastating storm in India are relatively trivial, unlike in the U.S. The cost of rebuilding must be met locally, while repair to an insured area affects a far wider economy; damage to the U.S. space shuttles could not easily be fixed by insurance.

INEQUALITY

In the short run, maintenance of overwhelming dominance may seem an effective survival strategy for the entitled. But if the gap between rich and poor becomes too great, does not the risk of desperate acts by the poor increase, therefore reducing rather than enhancing overall security? Are weapons of mass destruction, including biological, chemical and nuclear, more likely to be used in an increasingly unequal world, or in one in which the position of the poor is clearly improving?

What effects are regional food shortages in nuclear-armed South Asia likely to have? Will the entitled in those countries let the poor starve, as happened in (British-controlled) Bengal in 1943, or might they demand assistance from more entitled regions?

Reducing global inequality is one way to reduce the risk of CF. Increasing the entitlement of the poor, not only to food, but also education, and a sustainable future is not only morally good, but is also likely to increase the security of the more entitled.

PEACE, JUSTICE & HEALTH

Robert Aitken, Roshi is retired master of the Honolulu Diamond Sangha, a Zen Buddhist Society. He is co-founder of the Diamond Sangha, which now has centers in North and South America, Europe, and Australasia, and is also co-founder of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship. He is author of nine books on Zen Buddhism, including Taking the Path of Zen and The Practice of Perfection. He is living near his son in Puna on the Big Island of Hawai'i.

On looking through the literature of peace studies and ecology, I am struck by the frequent use of analogies of sickness and health. For example, Johan Galtung, founder of the International Peace Research Institute in Oslo, has remarked that if you ask, "What is the cause of war?" then really you are asking something like, "What is the cause of illness?"

As another example, Petra Karin Kelly, co-founder of De Grünen, the German Green Party, rejected war and the exploitation of the habitat as a sickness that arises from cold hearts and greedy ambition.¹ Gaia, our living planet, is ill. Entire species are dying out each day; forests are being relentlessly destroyed; rivers, lakes, and seas nourish their inhabitants less and less; and soil around the world is losing its fertility.

The community of human beings inhabiting Gaia is also ailing. Violent crimes endanger the peace of cities and villages, war destroys the accord within and among nations and exploitation of the weak by the strong blocks the fulfilment of human potential everywhere. The reckless destruction of our habitat brings famine, pestilence, and premature death to people in poorer parts of the world, and in increasingly larger areas within wealthier nations.

Manjushri asked Vimalakirti, "Why are you sick?" Vimalakirti said, "I am sick because the whole world is sick."² In context his words refer to the human condition, and the condition of all species. We are here only briefly, and soon will pass away without a trace. All things are transient. But his words can also be understood pathologically. Gaia's condition is dangerously toxic; therefore I, too, am poisoned.

We can reverse Vimalakirti's words: "The whole world is sick because I am sick." The pathological views of a single person infect all beings. Is it possible to reverse this paradigm still again? Even in the throes of a critical disease, even at the extremity of a life

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Nurses' training. D.T.R. Hospital in Mundgod, S. India, has expanded its infrastructure to accommodate minor surgery and a visiting surgeon. To upgrade their skills, BODHI funded a one-month training course for six nurses at a hospital at Bangalore Manipal Hospital. The hospital kindly gave the nurses a concession.

On-Site Health Educator. Tenpa TK writes, "D.T.R. has five new Village Health Educators whose primary responsibilities, in addition to general health, are to promote safe drinking water, to see that water is chlorinated regularly, and to keep a constant check on village sanitation and environmental protection activities." That brings D.T.R.'s total number of community health workers (CHWs) to twelve.

As it is more cost-effective to bring a health educator to D.T.R. rather than to send CHWs away for training, the hospital has invited Dr Ashok Sahni, Professor & Honorary Executive Director of the Indian Society of Health Administrators, Bangalore, to come to the hospital for training. BODHI will fund this.

Volunteer doctors in India. Drs. Dan Rikleen and Kristen Lobo began a stint in Mundgod in November. "Lots of mosquitoes at night, but little malaria that we are aware of," Dan writes. "They have plenty of TB . . . 13,000 population, 4,000 are monks in the monasteries. Some patients [supposedly] are resistant to all 1st, 2nd, 3rd line drugs and then in resignation sent back to their monasteries on a pledge of not mingling with the others." We look forward to hearing more in the next **BODHI Times**.

Village Generator. We are trying to find funds for a generator for a Mundgod village used as a central meeting place for health education purposes. Electricity supply is sporadic. Cost: US\$750/A\$1000.

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village, seven for the xiang). A village library with ten copies each of 100 different books costs US\$1300/A\$1750; its xiang counterpart, with ten copies each of 250 different books, costs US\$3013/A\$4017.

We may use some of Ruth Grant's bequest, but need more. Would you consider sponsoring a library, either alone or with friends? It can bear your name.

THANK YOU

There are so many of you to thank. Here are a few individuals . . .

Richard Beamish, USA
Frank Barone, USA
Neil Christopherson, USA
Malcolm Dick, Australia
Paul Easton, USA
Jeffrey Griffin, USA
Dr. Andrew & Maryanne Heslop, Australia
Dr. Gerry & Sally McGushin, Australia
Dr. John Sands, Australia
Prof. Frank Schofield, Australia
Clive & Cindy Walden, USA
Dr. John Wakerman, Australia
Dr. J. A. Ward, Australia
Gayl Welch, Ph.D., USA
Murray Wright, USA

. . . and organizations

Australian Tibetan Society for supporting our Tibet projects
Welch-Allyn for 2 ophthalmoscopes and a laryngoscope and blade

GUESS THE WEIGHT, GUESS THE NAME

Mrs. Charmaine Nathan of Chennai (Madras), India has offered to bake a cake and hold a "Guess the Weight for a rupee" contest. The winner gets the cake. She has also offered to make doll clothes and have a "Guess the Doll's Name" contest. Charmaine and her friends will make several different outfits for the doll. We note that the only concrete offer of help to the fundraising pleas in our last newsletter came from a developing country.

We may put the funds that Charmaine raises towards workshops on poverty for ordinary people in India, something that she and we think is important.

ACCOUNTANT NEEDED

The estate of Ruth Barnes Grant is winding down. BODHI will receive US\$7250. This and increased fundraising activities mean that we need an accountant familiar with U.S. federal and California state tax returns. Help!

What is BODHI?

Benevolent Organisation for Development, Health & Insight (BODHI) focuses on sustainable ways to improve health, education, the environment and human rights, particularly in developing countries. BODHI was founded in 1989 on the principle of skilful, compassionate action.

BODHI is neither religious nor political. We have supporters and advisers from many faiths. We ask only for a kind heart and practical assistance.

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?

WE NEED YOUR HELP

Thanks to your generosity, BODHI has been begun exciting and innovative projects. We need your donations to continue.

Please send your donation, payable in U.S. or Australian dollars, to an address below.

U.S. donations tax-deductible

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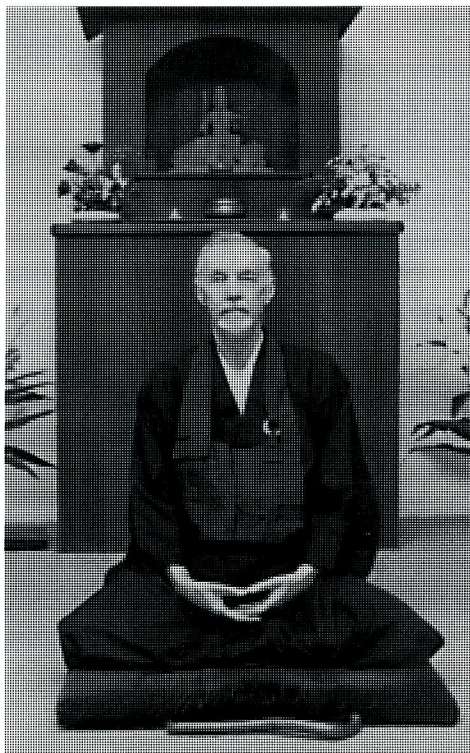
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our mailing list confidential**



Robert Aitken, Roshi Photo: Tom Haar

JOHN GORE ABOARD

We're thrilled that John Gore has agreed to be BODHI's Director of Fundraising, USA. As Director of International Internship for Lake Erie College, Painesville, Ohio, John placed student volunteers through BODHI in 1994-5. We look forward to continuing a productive and fun working relationship.

BODHI ADVISERS

The *British Medical Journal (BMJ)*, recently published a special issue (October 9) commemorating "6 Billion Day," the day on which the United Nations estimated the global population reached 6 billion souls, up from 1.6 billion in 1900. Of the twelve relevant articles, three were written or co-written by BODHI advisers. Dr Maurice King wrote two, including "The U.S. Department of State is policing the population policy lockstep." An editorial King co-authored with Professors John Guillebaud and Tony McMichael was called "Contrasting views on human population growth. One wisdom justifies complacency: the other demands action now."

The *BMJ* also featured the profile, "King in a maverick style" and a brief reply by King to Professor Tim Dyson's article, "Prospects for feeding the world."

Colin Butler responded to this special *BMJ* by writing the article, "Entrapment: global ecological or local demographic?" Read it at our website.

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or a community in ruins, is it possible to take up prophylaxis and therapy and work for a healthy person and a healthy world?

Several years ago, I visited an inmate at a minimum-security prison on the Island of Hawai'i. We had been corresponding for some time, but this was our first meeting. After we introduced ourselves, I asked if he had any questions. He said, "Tell me about the Buddhist Precepts."

JUST REACTING

There are Ten Grave Precepts in Mahayana Buddhism, beginning with the keystone injunction not to kill. I wasn't sure that he was really asking for an exposition, however, so I probed gently to see what might have prompted his request. He explained: "I want to be able to respond, and not just react."

My friend had diagnosed his sickness clearly. He knew that *just reacting* is pathological. I suggested that by focusing attention on his breathing he could find the peace that is buried under his thoughts and worries, and the leisure, so to speak, to adjust to whatever happens. He would have a chance to recall the teachings of not-harming. If he were struck by someone, he could respond quietly, "Why did you do that?" rather than just hit back. *Just reacting* by governments and corporations is equally pathological, but the conspiracy to fuel the juggernaut of desolation is systemic even to the nursing of infants. How can simple attention to the breathing possibly bring change?

By conspiracy, I would say that is, "breathing together." In small groups, like the base communities of Latin America and the Philippines, we can "build the new within the shell of the old," in words of the Wobblies. We can take ourselves in hand and do it ourselves. We can organize and network for social justice. We can set up or join already existing community saving and loan societies. We can set up worker cooperatives, food cooperatives, alternate schools, and network with like-minded base communities.

A. J. Muste, the great Quaker organizer of the mid-twentieth century, is said to have remarked, "There is no way to peace; peace is the way." For our purposes, I would reword it thus: "There is no way to a healthy society; our healthy societies are the way."

1. Frank Barnaby, general editor, *The Gaia Peace Atlas: Survival into the Third Millennium* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), pp. 22, 36.

2. Charles Luk, trans., *The Vimalakirti Nirdesha Sutra* (Boston: Shambhala, 1990), p. 50.