

THE WORLD CAN'T WAIT **INTER FAITH VIGIL: JUNE 7TH 2007**

The Buddha on Economic Justice

At the time of the Buddha, political systems were in transition from democratic forms of local governance to big governmental systems ruled by economic considerations rather than for the common good. To the latter the Buddha served as a critical friend, reminding the rulers of his day that their realms would not prosper if they lost sight of the human factor.

His criticism was often made acceptable through the medium of slightly humorous parables. One such appears in the *Kutadanta Sutta* which tells of a king whose country was in a state of social melt-down. In order to shore up his privileged and comfortable position, he decides to raise taxes for a huge religious sacrifice. Thinking he would be pleased, the king shares his plans with his chaplain who suggests an altogether different kind of sacrifice. His land, he is told, 'is harried by robbers who pillage the villages and townships, and who make the roads unsafe. Were the king, so long as that is so, to levy a fresh tax, verily His Majesty would be acting wrongly. But perchance His Majesty might think: 'I'll soon put a stop to these scoundrels' game by degradation and banishment, by fines and bonds and death!' But their licence cannot be satisfactorily put a stop to so. The remnant left unpunished would still go on harassing the realm. Now there is one method to adopt to put a thorough end to this disorder. Whosoever there be in the king's realm who devote themselves to keeping cattle and the farm, to them let His Majesty give food and seed-corn. Whosoever there be in the king's realm who devote themselves to trade, to them let His Majesty give capital. Whosoever there be in the king's realm who devote themselves to government service, to them let His Majesty give wages and food. Then those men, following each his own business, will no longer harass the realm. The king's revenue will go up; the country will be quiet and at peace; and the populace, pleased one with another and happy, dancing their children in their arms, will dwell with open doors.'

Generosity of treatment and seeking the common good, the Buddha teaches here, is a better way of ensuring economic welfare than any amount of remote management and pious platitude. It is the same at a global level as it is at the local level, for in Buddhism it is motivation that is considered important rather than this or that prescribed procedure. People aren't fools. Where the pursuit of profit is governed by selfishness and greed, it is plain for all to see and respect for law and decency breaks down at all levels. Our message to the G8 leaders is that, even at the level of self interest, a genuine pursuit of economic justice makes more sense in the long run.

From the Christian Bible:

'Hear this, you that trample on the poor and needy, and bring ruin to the poor of the land,
Saying, 'When will the new moon be over so that we may sell grain;
And the Sabbath, so that we may offer wheat for sale?'
We will make the ephah small and the shekel great,
And practise deceit with false balances, buying the poor for silver
And the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling the sweepings of the wheat.'
The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob: surely I will never forget any of their deeds.'

Amos 8 v 4 – 7

'Jesus.... taught them saying,
'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.....
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.'

Matthew 5 v 1-3, 6,7,9

A prayer:

May God bless us with discomfort...
At easy answers, half truths and superficial relationships,
So that we may live deep in our hearts.

May God bless us with anger...
At injustice, oppression and exploitation of people,
So that we may work for justice, freedom and peace.

May God bless us with tears...
To shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation and war,
So that we may reach out our hands to comfort them
And turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless us with enough foolishness...
To believe that we can make a difference in this world,
So that we can do what others claim cannot be done. Amen

ओ३म् द्यौः शान्तिरन्तरिक्षं शान्तिः पृथिवी शान्तिरापः शान्तिरोषधयः
शान्तिः। वनस्पतयः शान्तिर्विश्वे देवाः शान्तिर्ब्रह्म शान्तिः सव
शान्तिः शान्तिरेव शान्तिः सा मा शान्तिरेधि। ओ३म् शान्तिः
शान्तिः शान्तिः। (यजु ३६, १७)

**Om dyanh shanti•ranta•riksha•gm shantih prithivi
shanti•rapah shanti•ro•shadhayah shantih.
Vanas•patayah shantir•vishve devah shantir•brahma
shantih sarvagm shanti•rev shantih sa ma shanti•redhee.
Om shantih shantih shantih!
(Yajurveda 36/17)**

*O God, may there be peace in the Sky and in Space. May there be peace
on land and in the waters. May herbs and vegetation bring us peace.
May all personifications of God bring us peace. May God bring us peace.
May there be peace throughout the world. May the peace be peaceful.
May God give me such peace also.*

Hindu : Shantih Paath mantra

The immense distance between the world's poor and the world's prosperous continues to increase. That poverty is the handmaiden of disease, malnutrition, despair and rage. Such is the reality of our world.

We tend to forget, to shut our minds to the suffering of fellow human beings far away, because we have our own problems, or we are too busy, or because there is so little we can do. And sometimes we commit an even graver sin, and allow ourselves to think that all receive what they deserve.

God, let us not be content when others lack their daily bread, let us not be serene while some have no roof over their heads. Teach us to give thanks for what we have by sharing it with those who are in need. And teach us how to build a world in which all Your children will enjoy your blessings and praise Your goodness.

From the prayer book of Progressive Judaism: Siddur Lev Chadash p 285 – 287 adapted

In the name of the Lord, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind.

There are many Quranic verses and Hadith (traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him) relating to relieving debt and alleviating poverty. The Quran states:

“If the debtor is in a difficulty, grant him time till it is easy to repay. But if ye remit it by way of charity, that is best for you, if ye only knew.” (The Qur’an Chapter 2, verse 280)

On the authority of Abu Huraira (may Allah be pleased with him) from the Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) who said, **"Whoever alleviates [the situation of] one in dire straits who cannot repay his debt, Allah will alleviate his lot in both this world and the Hereafter."** [Muslim]

Relieving one brother's debt is an act that is beloved to Allah - and has obvious implications for the strength of the brotherhood. One can relieve a person's debt and gain the blessings mentioned in this hadith.

The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) also said,

There was a trader who used to give loans to the people. If he noticed that one was in straitened circumstances, he would tell his boy [working for him], 'Excuse him so that Allah may excuse us and overlook [and forgive our sins] for us.' Therefore, Allah overlooked [his sins] and forgave him." (Al-Bukhari and Muslim)

Various Hadith point out that if a person makes life very difficult for another person by making him repay a debt that he simply cannot afford to pay, then Allah may also make life difficult for him both in this life and on the Day of Judgment.

We implore on our leaders to cancel the interest on loans. Many countries have repaid double of what they have borrowed but cannot move forward because they are still being made to pay interest over what they have borrowed. Interest (usury) is forbidden in Islam and cannot be given or taken. One of the strongest verses of the Holy Qur’an also relates to interest; saying: ...”if you do not (give up interest remaining outstanding), then be sure of being at war with God and His Messenger (Surah al-Baqarah, verse 278-279).

In conclusion, let us pray:

Our Lord! Condemn us not if we forget, or miss the mark! Our Lord! Lay not on us such a burden. Our Lord! Impose not on us that which we have not the strength to bear! Pardon us, absolve us and have mercy on us. Our Lord! Guide our leaders and give them hidaya to do what is best for our brothers and sisters suffering all over the world. Ameen

With thanks to all who have helped in the preparation of this leaflet.

You are invited to take it away and use the readings for your own reflection.

Concern for the earth and its people is shared by all the world’s great faiths, including those not represented here. It is also shared by many people of no faith.

We share this concern in solidarity with people throughout the world, in prayer, thought and meditation, recognising our differences and respecting each other’s scriptures and traditions.

Please treat this leaflet with the respect it is due, and listen, observe or participate as you feel you can.

Ruth Tetlow, Jubilee Debt Campaign