



World Goodwill

NEWSLETTER

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A regular bulletin highlighting the energy of goodwill in world affairs

REFLECTIONS ON THE TSUNAMI

December 26 2004 is a date that will stay carved into the human psyche for many years to come. A disaster so huge in its magnitude that it is almost beyond our capacity to grasp. More than 200,000 dead. Perhaps 5 million homeless. Whole communities erased as if they were never there. Such devastation could lead to despair – yet the huge response of compassionate giving and action shows that “the heart of humanity is sound”. The enormous scope of the disaster means that any discussion of it is bound to be partial; what follows are some thoughts offered in the hope that some may prove useful.

We live on a planet, and in a universe, of which catastrophe and cataclysm are an integral part. Meteors have struck the Earth, extinguishing large fractions of all living creatures; giant volcanoes have devastated wide areas and changed planetary climate; sea levels have risen and fallen, creating new patterns of habitable land. Because such events happen *relatively* infrequently (relative to the short time spans of human civilisation), we find it difficult to imagine their huge impact. Yet they do happen, and we must try to find ways of acknowledging this. They may come tomorrow, or in a thousand years, or in a million. Their unpredictability gives a salutary jolt to the complacent comfort of life in the richer countries. The fact that such events would affect us all can lead to an increased sense of human unity: and the planet-wide generosity of the public, governments and businesses in the case of the tsunami is a tangible and heartening sign of this.

The scale of this disaster spans much of the southern shore of a continent, and the death toll touches countries far beyond. And yet, if we sincerely believe that Life is

present throughout the universe, thrilling alike through the smallest atom and the vastest cosmic structure, appearing in an infinite variety of forms, then we can at least *begin* to accept that the scale of this event is only large relative to the very small cosmic neighbourhood of our planet. And if we take seriously the notion that Life itself is eternal, and *cannot* be destroyed, though the forms in which it appears may come and go, then we can recognise that the ending of so many forms at once, while terrible to all those involved, does not diminish Life itself. And when we further reflect that it takes about a week for malnutrition and *preventable* disease to end the same number of lives, and that this happens *every week*, then perhaps a more balanced perspective can begin to emerge.

Sometimes we call such events an “act of God” – for what other agency could operate on such a scale? This leads to the temptation to somehow try to “pin the blame” on God, a temptation identified by Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury¹, and Rabbi Michael Lerner². Their responses to this temptation are helpful and illuminating in this dark period of grief.

Rowan Williams suggests that it is wrong to think of God as a puppet-master, either with respect to human actions or the processes of the world. The world has to have a pattern of its own, and we must learn how to cope with this pattern. He admits, however, that this recognition on its own is small consolation in the face of huge disasters. Even so, belief in God has survived such catastrophes again and again, because believers cannot deny what has been shown to them – that life is a gift, that they are called to accept God’s mercy for themselves and to make it real for others, and that there is some

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Editor:
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reality to which they can only relate in amazement and silence. He continues that the most important thing in this connection is that believers have learned to relate to other people with something of the same amazement and silence that God draws out of them. So they recognise the infinite preciousness of every human life, which calls for a passionate engagement with those who have survived, helping them in whatever ways are possible.

Rabbi Lerner notes that asking where God was during the tsunami may be an attempt to avoid the question, where was humanity? – in other words, why have we been so unwilling to take serious responsibility for the well-being of others on the planet? To put the scale of the tsunami in context, he imagines a situation in which, every day, the media gave prominent coverage to the 29000 children who die daily of avoidable diseases and malnutrition, while also highlighting the excess wealth in industrialised countries. He proposes that if this story were told every day, the innate goodness of human beings would quickly rebel against the social structures that make all this suffering possible, and would vote into power leaders who prioritised solving this planetary malaise. He speculates that one reason this doesn't happen is because the tsunami is a "natural" disaster, so no one person or group can be identified as blameworthy. This thought can be extended – if we think that some problems, such as poverty or disease, are at least partially man-made in origin, we may see them as intractable until there is a widespread and permanent change in human hearts. Perhaps another reason is that, because the loss of life in the tsunami is concentrated into such a short period, it is inherently more visible and so "newsworthy".

Healing and transformation

Like Rowan Williams, Rabbi Lerner says he has no easy answers to the question of God's role in the tsunami. He does, however, have two responses, which are two different ways of thinking about the nature of God. The first way is to think of God as the force of healing and transformation in the universe, the source of love, kindness, generosity, social justice, peace and evolving consciousness, which permeates every atom of being and continually moves it towards greater levels of love and connection and consciousness. In other words, Rabbi Lerner is suggesting that God can be equated with the force and direction of evolution. In this context, Lerner echoes Williams in proposing that God is nevertheless not directly responsible for everything that happens.

The second way of conceiving of God is to adopt the view that natural disasters are connected in ways that we cannot yet know with the ethical and spiritual distortions of life and consciousness at its current stage

of development. This takes seriously the notion that the Earth itself is alive, and that its energies cannot come fully into balance until the moral and spiritual realms are more in harmony with the universe's ultimate moral design. So the shifting of the Earth's tectonic plates, the vagaries of climate change, and the continual mutation of diseases are all, in this view, ultimately linked with the ethical codes of humanity, ethical codes which are a continually evolving attempt to conform to what we understand God wants from us.

This view places a special duty on the shoulders of humanity, as the kingdom of nature in which the main prerequisite for ethical behaviour, free will, first emerges. Lerner himself has some reservations about this perspective – he notes, for example, that it can be misunderstood as blaming individuals for their own suffering. His response to this is that the karmic order does not happen on a one-to-one basis, and there is no implication that all those who suffer in a disaster are equally responsible for the moral disorder that led to it. On the other hand, there *is* the implication that, in some sense, everyone on the planet bears some share of the responsibility for the general distortion of values, and therefore for disasters, wherever and whenever they occur.

Immanence and transcendence

Both of Lerner's ways of thinking about God and the tsunami can be linked to the ideas presented in the works of Alice Bailey. For example, Bailey proposes that the climate is affected by human consciousness, and that the Earth itself is alive in a sense not yet fully recognised or understood by modern science (although the Gaia hypothesis of James Lovelock is a significant step in this direction). She presents God as both an immanent presence within all beings, giving life and consciousness to every form, from an atom through a planet to a galaxy and beyond; and as ultimately transcending all these forms – in the words of Krishna, "having pervaded the whole universe with a fragment of Myself, I remain". And this immanent presence and transcendent being are purposeful, and are propelling physical and conscious evolution towards ever-greater levels of perfected expression. This propelling force behind evolution is often identified as Love, conceived in the widest terms. This connects with Rowan Williams' idea that the primary response in the face of such disasters must be compassion. Moreover, Bailey highlights the fact that there is inevitably a certain measure of resistance within matter itself to this evolutionary pressure, a resistance which can lead to the build-up of stresses within both the material world and the world of consciousness, stresses which, unless conscious efforts are made to alleviate them, can sometimes be released explosively. Her conception of the complex operation of karma on many levels

– personal, group, national, species and planetary – provides a framework within which a causal connection between human behaviour and planetary events can be explored, although, as Lerner hints, at our current level of spiritual maturity, it is highly doubtful that any definitive conclusions can be reached.

From the more cosmic perspective of the Bailey writings, another dimension to the question of God's "role" in disasters is the idea that our Earth humanity should not expect to be the sole focus of divine attention. While our contribution to the onward progress of life and consciousness is vital within the bounds of the Earth, it is still only a small contribution to the vast Whole which is constantly unfolding. So for example, adjustments to the flow of life elsewhere in the solar system could indirectly influence events here, just as any localised change in an organism – eating food, being stung, etc. – will have effects on the whole. This is simply an extension of the earlier thought that the chains, or rather networks, of cause and effect in the universe are more complex and subtle than the human mind can yet understand. And these networks of action and reaction are an expression of the unfolding Life of all beings everywhere. In the words of the poet Francis Thompson, "All things by immortal power, | Near and far, | Hiddenly | To each other linked are, | That thou canst not stir a flower | Without troubling a star."

The physical devastation caused by the tsunami is enormous. Huge swathes of coastal infrastructure have been swept away, complicating relief efforts. Coastal agriculture has been damaged, and the salt poisoning of fields and wells left in the wake of the sea will take much time to heal. One positive that has emerged has been the swift deployment of soldiers from many nations, who are trained to find solutions where communications and transport are disrupted. The rebuilding of thousands of homes and shops, and of roads connecting communities together, will, nevertheless, take much time, which means that aid efforts must be maintained in the medium and long term. Hopefully this will help extend the planning horizons of donors, and of humanity as a whole, as the temptation is always to look for the "quick fix".

Prayer, silence and service

Healing the physical damage, while a massive undertaking, may at least have a recognisable point of closure, when all are once more safely housed (although, given that many of those affected may not previously have had access to good sanitation and running water, there is the opportunity to provide these, so improving living conditions). However, the subjective, inner perception of what has happened, the tremendous suffering and anxiety, the abrupt termination of 200,000+ unique perspectives on the

world, the vast disruption of family and community relationships and the extinction of livelihoods for those left behind, is the truly heart-rending part, which may traumatise people far into the future. There is a wound in the world's heart, and we must succour it: through prayer; through silence; through service.

Recognising the awful suffering that this disaster has caused, it is nevertheless possible to see its potential for future good. A brief opportunity has opened up in such places as Aceh and Sri Lanka to settle long-running conflicts. There is already evidence of a possible shift in Sri Lanka, where for example, on his own initiative, a Sinhalese businessman filled a truck with aid and drove it into Tamil territory to distribute it; and a government minister met a Tamil Tiger official in the course of helping those affected, and both suggested that after the tsunami, their peoples must work together; and the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, a major Sri Lankan NGO, has called on all Sri Lankans to become involved in creating a new vision for the country. An informal truce has been operating in Aceh, and Finland's Crisis Management Initiative, headed by former President Martti Ahtisaari, confirmed that Indonesian government officials and rebel leaders would meet in the week beginning 24 January in Helsinki to discuss a formal cease-fire.

Another positive development is in the opportunity for increased cooperation among the nations affected, particularly in the task of working on an early warning system for future tsunamis. The UN is naturally involved in this process, and its work in coordinating relief has given it a chance to demonstrate its essential value after recent heavy criticism. And as part of the effort to give financial help, the prospect has arisen of immediate debt relief for the countries most affected, and this in turn has raised the profile on this subject for countries around the world. The decreased damage to areas protected by coastal mangrove forests has shown the importance of conserving these natural defences, and by extension, raises the question of humanity's understanding of, and relation to, the other kingdoms of nature (it has been noted that there were far fewer animal deaths than would have been expected, as many animals and birds fled inland before the tsunami struck). One further example of how the disaster has increased awareness of wrong relationships is the way it has shone a powerful light on the evils of trafficking in women and children in some countries. This may help eradicate this evil trade.

The UN undersecretary-general for humanitarian affairs, Jan Egeland, who is largely responsible for coordinating the relief work, has noted that the wonderful way in which the world is responding to this disaster should become the new standard for relief efforts everywhere. He has also been keen to remind people

that the scope of this disaster should not distract us from the many other situations around the world where emergency relief is needed; and in particular, that the funds contributed should be new money, and not drawn from existing aid budgets.

Human unity

In the last analysis, it is to be hoped that the most enduring legacy of this event is not any physical act of relief, though each one is vital, but the more subjective sense of human solidarity and unity that it has created. If this spirit can be carried on into the multitude of international, national and local meetings about human problems that are continually happening, then there is a real opportunity for humanity to take an evolutionary step forward, and bring the kingdom of heaven – a subjective state of perfected relationships, with all that this implies for equality, justice and human dignity – one step closer to realisation here on Earth. It is a basic attribute of the progressive evolution of Life and Consciousness in our universe that it always seeks to turn bad circumstances to good account. We can consciously participate in this by literally “processing” this and other major events – transforming their meaning and significance for ourselves and for others

by reflection, meditation³ and action (service). In doing so, we become points of radiating light and love in a vast network of servers who are slowly but steadily uplifting and redeeming the human kingdom, and the animal, plant and mineral kingdoms too. The service of many, if not most, of these people may largely go unsung – but that does not matter. What matters is that this path of service lies open to all, and that the more who accept it, the quicker will be the realisation of its goal – right relationships – throughout the world. From what has been said earlier about the relationship between God and cosmic evolution, it is clear that taking one’s place within this network of servers is literally accepting, in however small a measure, the responsibility of co-creating the future with God – an awesome but joyful task.

1. “Of course this makes us doubt God’s existence” by Rowan Williams, *Telegraph* (www.telegraph.co.uk), 4 January 2005.
2. “Where was God in the Tsunami? And where has humanity been?” by Rabbi Michael Lerner, *Tikkun* (www.tikkun.org), 3 January 2005.
3. One meditation that readers may wish to use is the Goodwill Meditation. The outline is available from our web site at: www.lucitrust.org/goodwill/medgroup/outline.shtml and a booklet explaining the work in more detail is available on request from us (see back page for addresses).

RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT: A SRI LANKAN EXAMPLE

There will be scores, perhaps hundreds, of organisations involved in the relief efforts for the tsunami, ranging from the major UN agencies like UNICEF, to international NGOs like Oxfam, and on down the scale to local groups. A well-established group in one of the worst-hit countries, Sri Lanka, is the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement. Donations for both immediate relief work and longer-term development can be made to them directly via their website, www.sarvodaya.org, and the following material is adapted from there.

The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement started 47 years ago. Sarvodaya is Sanskrit for “Awakening of All”, and Shramadana means to donate effort. Initially it involved an education program aimed at enabling students and teachers to live and work with the most remote village communities in Sri Lanka to assist with their self help initiatives. Within nine years, however, the “service learning program” had expanded into a full-fledged development movement in hundreds of villages, with the goal of a comprehensive and nonviolent social transformation. During its first 15 years, Sarvodaya grew with hardly any foreign aid or state support.

By the late 1970s, the Sarvodaya Movement, with support from partner organizations in more prosperous countries, became capable of reaching nearly every part of Sri Lanka. The program of self-reliance, community participation, and a holistic approach to community

“awakening” appealed not only to the people in poor communities, but also to donors. Thousands of young women and men learned how to motivate and organize people in their own villages to meet the ten basic human needs, ranging from a clean and adequate drinking-water supply to simple housing and sanitation, communications facilities, an energy supply, education, and ways of satisfying spiritual and cultural needs.

The momentum of the movement was such that by the early 1990s, in spite of harassment by the government and political violence, it had achieved an enormous outreach. The movement’s work included peace building, conflict resolution, appropriate technology, and programs for children at risk, elders and those with disabilities – all the while focusing on a holistic approach to social mobilization through empowerment of people beyond mere economic development.

Sarvodaya is clearly rooted in Gandhian and Buddhist traditions, but actively engages people of all religions and ethnic backgrounds. Events at the village, district and national levels often begin with non-denominational meditation and invocations from the perspectives of all religions represented.

Village Sarvodaya Shramadana Societies are at the core of the Movement’s grassroots approach. Long before this disaster, Sarvodaya’s “5R” (Relief. Reconstruction. Rehabilitation. Reconciliation and Re-awakening) unit demonstrated

the Movement's uniquely integrated strategies for serving village people affected by the adversities of the civil war, a struggling economy and unreliable rains.

Sarvodaya has many years of experience responding to natural disasters like floods, droughts and landslides as well as man-made disasters. With its unique structure of district and divisional coordinators it is very well connected to the grass roots and Sarvodaya's reputation in the community made it a trusted partner in its outreach activities. Alerted by a newspaper article about a forthcoming cyclone, Sarvodaya carried out a disaster management briefing at the end of November at the monthly district coordinators meeting, with the help of an officer from the Department of Meteorology. Due to this pre-meditated exercise Sarvodaya was in a very strong position to handle the disaster. Sarvodaya deployed its entire available staff at the Headquarters and as many as possible in the field to deal with the devastation caused by the tsunami, ignoring nearly all of its day to day regular activities both in the field and at the Headquarters. For about a week, normal Sarvodaya work came to a virtual standstill. Many volunteers assisted in this effort and assistance was also forthcoming from the private sector and other agencies. Sarvodaya Founder President and Leader Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne personally visited all affected districts in the South, North and East with a team of senior staff members to assess the situation first hand.

Within hours Sarvodaya started receiving a significant amount of support from ordinary Sri Lankan citizens, the private sector and its international supporters, including the Sarvodaya branches from U.S.A., Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany and other key resource partners such as the Novartis Foundation of Switzerland and the Arigatou Foundation of Japan. Thousands of compassionate minds from around the world donated through web-based payment gateways. Sarvodaya is deeply moved by this heartfelt generosity and is committed to acknowledging it by way of putting this money into good use.

Sarvodaya, with its previous experience in disaster management, put the emphasis on providing RELIEF to the affected people located throughout the country. The RELIEF effort provided the following:

- Cooked food, followed by dry rations
- Clean drinking water
- Clothes for men, women & children
- First aid, medical supplies and care which included teams of doctors
- Tents and tarpaulins to provide temporary shelter
- Temporary sanitary facilities
- Volunteers

The above services and supplies reached all 14 affected districts and benefited approximately 40,000 displaced families.

Within a few days following the disaster, Sarvodaya made a rapid, qualitative assessment of the camp management status and a report was circulated to relief organizations, including the UN agencies. This report became an important reference document in the entire tsunami relief operation. Sarvodaya leader Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne visited all affected districts including Jaffna and Mullaitivu and met with the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) leadership to discuss rehabilitation measures. The Executive Director Dr. Vinya Ariyaratne participated in discussions with the Secretary General of the UN, Mr. Kofi Annan and the President of the World Bank Mr. James Wolfensohn.

While the immediate relief services described above were provided within one to three days, action was also taken to ensure the following to many of the displaced /affected people:

- Re-constituting family units,
- Providing counselling by trained personnel to deal with trauma
- Providing continuous medical care, especially to pregnant mothers and children
- Cleaning wells
- Disinfecting places of temporary residence
- Organising programmes for pre-school and school children
- Meaningful work for adults for food / cash

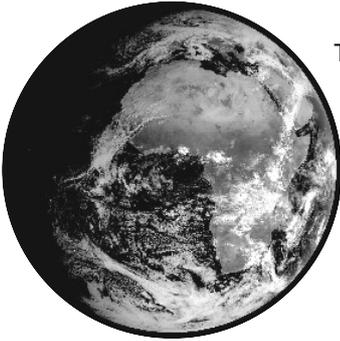
What remains to be done is not simply building a house for those which have been flattened, or rebuilding the roads and rail tracks which have been badly damaged, or re-establishing the social welfare services such as health and education, or re-starting the commercial activities needed for the daily life of the people, but to do all these and much more as well, within a sustained national effort to build a new country; a NEW SRI LANKA.

(To read more, and donate directly, go to www.sarvodaya.org or contact: Sarvodaya Headquarters, No.98, Rawatawatta Road, Moratuwa, Sri Lanka. Tel: +94.11.264.7159, +94.11.555.0756, +94.11.265.5255; Fax: +94.11.555.7972

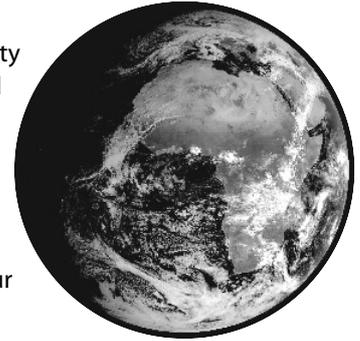
For Foreign remittance

Account Name: Lanka Jathika Sarvodaya Shramadana Sangamaya(Inc.); Account No: Acct. No 159000 8015; Account Currency – All currencies accepted; Bank: Commercial Bank of Ceylon Ltd.; Branch: Moratuwa; Address: No.116, Galle Road, Moratuwa, Sri Lanka; SWIFT CCEY.LK.LX)

World Invocation Day 2005



To build a more just, interdependent and caring global society what humanity needs above all, is more light, love and spiritual will. On **Monday 23rd May 2005**, people of goodwill from all parts of the world, and from different religious and spiritual backgrounds unite in invoking these higher energies by using the Great Invocation. Will you join in this healing work by including the Great Invocation in your thoughts, your prayers or your meditations on World Invocation Day?



THE GREAT INVOCATION

From the point of Light within the Mind of God
Let light stream forth into the minds of men.
Let Light descend on Earth.

From the point of Love within the Heart of God
Let love stream forth into the hearts of men.
May Christ return to Earth.

From the centre where the Will of God is known
Let purpose guide the little wills of men –
The purpose which the Masters know and serve.

From the centre which we call the race of men
Let the Plan of Love and Light work out
And may it seal the door where evil dwells.

Let Light and Love and Power restore the Plan on Earth.

(adapted version)

From the point of Light within the Mind of God
Let light stream forth into human minds.
Let Light descend on Earth.

From the point of Love within the Heart of God
Let love stream forth into human hearts.
May the Coming One return to Earth.

From the centre where the Will of God is known
Let purpose guide all little human wills –
The purpose which the Masters know and serve.

From the centre which we call the human race
Let the Plan of Love and Light work out
And may it seal the door where evil dwells.

Let Light and Love and Power restore the Plan on Earth.

HELPING TO BUILD RIGHT HUMAN RELATIONS

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World Goodwill is an international movement helping to mobilise the energy of goodwill and to build right human relations. It was established in 1932 as a service activity of the Lucis Trust. The Lucis Trust is a registered educational charity in Great Britain. In the USA it is a non-profit tax-exempt educational corporation, and in Switzerland it is registered as a non-profit association. WORLD GOODWILL is recognised by the United Nations as a Non-Governmental Organisation and is represented at regular briefing sessions at UN Headquarters. The Lucis Trust is on the Roster of the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

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www.worldgoodwill.org is the address for World Goodwill on the Internet. The newsletter is available on this site.

World Goodwill relies solely on donations to maintain its work. The newsletter is distributed free of charge to make it as widely available as possible, but donations are always needed for this service, and are much appreciated.

3 Whitehall Court
Suite 54
London SW1A 2EF
UK

1 Rue de Varembe (3è)
Case Postale 31
1211 Geneva 20
SWITZERLAND

120 Wall Street
24th Floor
New York NY10005
USA