

# GLOBAL EXPRESS

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Religions - rivals or allies?

New Civilisation in Moldova

## Taking Action For Life

If not me, who? If not now, when?

# banana enlightenment

One day I entered a temple, looked around and suddenly noticed a monk sitting there. He was smiling. I asked him why he was smiling and he answered, 'Because I have just understood the meaning of a banana.'

He pulled out of his bag a rotten, overripe banana, 'This is a life that has come to an end before it has been used and now it is too late.'

Then he produced a green banana, showed it to me and put it back in his bag, 'This is a life that has not yet come to an end but is still waiting for the right moment.'

He eventually produced a ripe banana, peeled it, shared it with me and said, 'This is now the right moment—live it without fear.'

There is no particular reason why I should identify with a banana but that is what I spontaneously did. I thought I would rather be a green banana still waiting for the right moment to come, than be

eaten up by a smiling monk and a curious tourist.

Recently a friend from South Africa shared her fear of accepting the call she had received in a dream. This banana story came back to my mind.

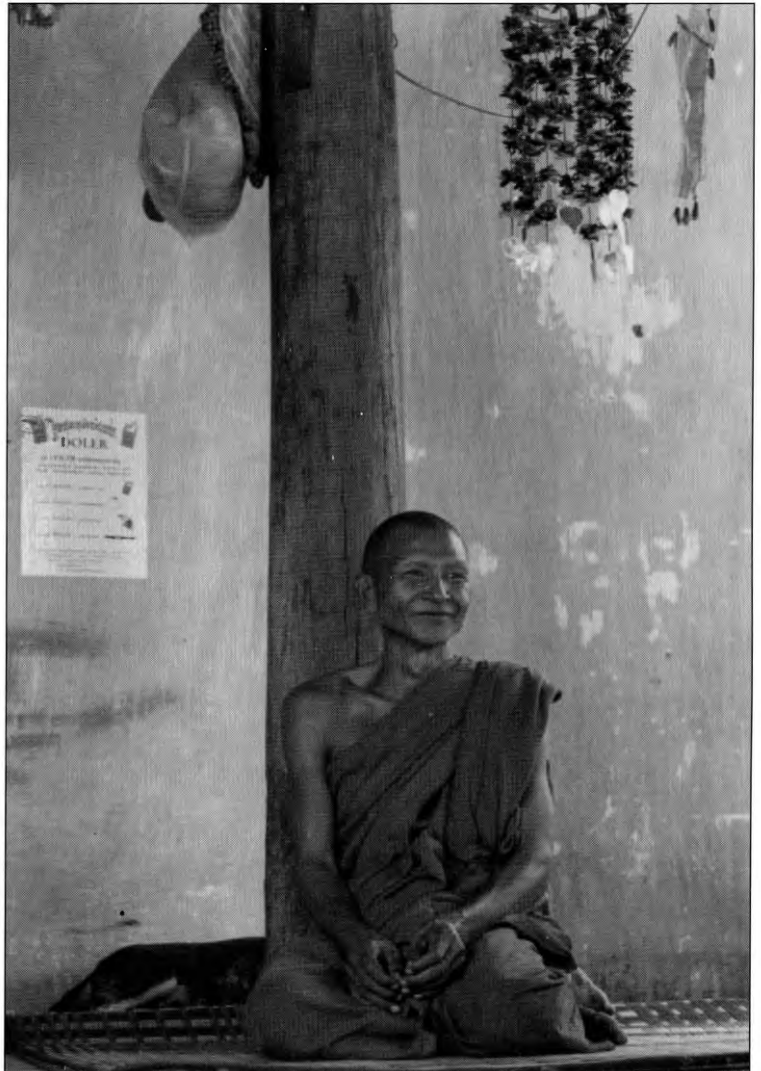
I too fear being eaten up by a vision, a project, a call for which I am not prepared or meant for. However, the next step of my banana enlightenment was to realise that I am not a banana which has no choice but that I am on the other side. I have the choice to either eat the banana and live my life without fear or to allow

my life to become unused, like a rotten banana.

Living my life means to give it to whom it belongs, and to trust that He will fill an empty stomach with the sweet taste of life that my humble banana existence can provide.

And you? Are you green, ripe or overripe? Are you waiting for something to happen, or has the right moment already come?

**Maria Wolf, Germany**



Buddhist monk in Kompong Chhnanang Province, Cambodia, Photo: David Channer

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## Why Global Express?

Global Express (GE) was started in Melbourne, Australia, in 1994 to link up young people who care about the future. Dissatisfied with what we were being offered by commercial youth magazines, we felt an alternative was needed.

Our aim is to inspire people to believe in themselves, and to believe they can make a difference. In GE you can question the way things are, and search for solutions. It is also a great opportunity to make contacts outside your 'comfort zone'.

Most of the GE team met through Initiatives of Change (formerly Moral Re-Armament), a worldwide network of people working for personal responsibility and conflict resolution. Absolute standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love, together with a search for inspiration from God (or the inner voice), are central to this approach to life. Initiatives of Change is a Non Government Organisation recognised by the United Nations.

For more information: <http://www.initiativesofchange.org/>

**Global Express, 73 Victoria Road, Oxford, OX2 7QG, United Kingdom**

E-mail: [globalex@oxford.mra.org.uk](mailto:globalex@oxford.mra.org.uk)

Tel: +44 1865 511 800 Fax: +44 1865 311 950

On the web: <http://www.mra.org.uk/globalex/>

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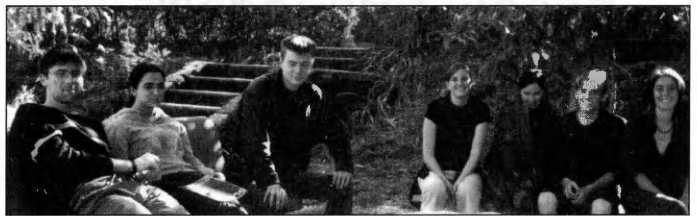
When the last issue came out the future of Global Express was uncertain. This was the situation when the Editorial team attended the international 'Global Hoho' in India earlier this year. The word 'Hoho' comes from Nagaland and means a 'meeting of great importance'. Over two hundred people from 40 countries met for three weeks to search together for answers to questions such as, 'What is the spirit of God attempting to bring to birth in the world?' and 'What is our part in bringing that vision to birth?'

Whilst there we met up with the dynamic Action For Life team who are undergoing a rigorous 10 month training programme with Initiatives of Change throughout India and South-East Asia. Several participants attended meetings about the magazine's future and some will join the Editorial team based in Oxford after the Action For Life programme ends in Malaysia in August.

A keynote speaker at the 'Global Hoho' quoted from the Koran: 'Even God does not change the people unless the people change themselves'. With Action For Life leading the way, this issue of GE has many examples of where people have undergone personal change. Eglantina Xhaja from Albania writes of her struggle with worry. Marianne Wada from Japan opens up about how she came to embrace her bi-racial identity. And Bono with his campaign to close the Rich World-Poor World Gap issues a challenge to us all by saying that, 'In the end you've got to become the change you want to see in the world.' Actually Gandhi said it first but it does no harm to hear it again!

**Next Issue:** Discovering the Other

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**Editor:** Laura Trevelyan **Guest Editor:** Owen Lean **Layout & Design:**

Emma Cromwell **Cover Photos (India):** Fiona Leggat **Proofreading:**

Jacqui Daukes **Website Co-ordinator:** Ward Vandewege **Asia Pacific**

**Co-ordinator:** Maria Lancaster **Special Thanks:** Rosa Bellino, Dick

Channer, Christine Cross, Phoebe Gill, Jackie and Nick Goodwin &

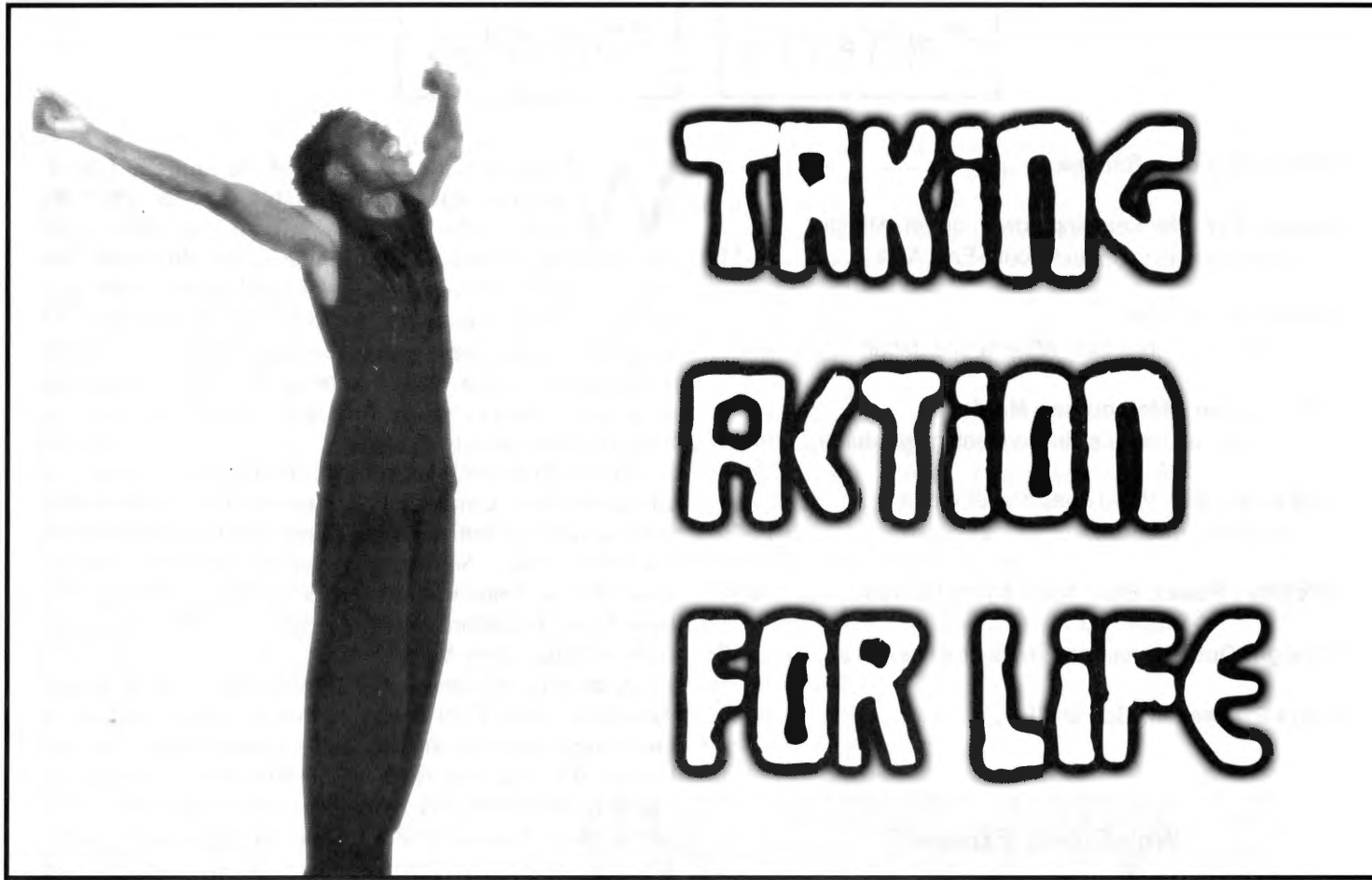
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### Global Express Goes to

Africa: Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa; Americas: Brazil, Canada and USA; Asia/Pacific: Australia, Cambodia, Fiji, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand and Western Samoa; Europe: Croatia, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Russia, Scandinavia, Serbia, Switzerland, UK and Ukraine; Middle East: Lebanon and Palestine



‘One day I had a crazy idea, and thirty crazy people responded’, is how Liu Ren-Jou once described his brainchild Action For Life (AFL).

Taking ten months out from study or work to travel through Asia with an organisation like Initiatives of Change may not be a normal decision—but for those taking part it is one that is changing the way they understand 'normal'. Representing fifteen countries and several faith traditions, the group came together in India, in September 2001. After five adventurous months exchanging experiences and convictions with Indians across the country, two teams were formed to travel on through East and South-East Asia.

So what would cause someone to follow through such a 'crazy idea'? A father of teenagers and full-time charity worker for almost 20 years, Ren-Jou felt it important for the up-and-coming generation to experience being part of a committed team. The length and inter-generational nature of the programme to cultivate leadership and life-changing skills thus developed.

Of course being thrown together in an unfamiliar environment does not make teamwork instantaneous. Expectations and personalities have sometimes come into conflict, even with ground rules of honest sharing

Photos: Fiona Leggat and Ward Vandewege



Sarah Wood, New Zealand



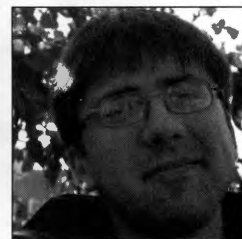
Ildze Slanke, Latvia



Amos Seyama, South Africa



Laura Vertigan, Australia



Oleg Emurati, Moldova

and respect for differences. Ren-Jou admits that much wisdom is required to give sensitive care whilst maintaining the interests of the whole group. 'Not to mention a lot of prayer,' he adds with humility.

As 'initiators of change', participants take on

**being part of a group that is more interested in knowing how I am correcting where I have gone wrong, rather than how good or nice I am is quite a novel experience**

responsibility for the many interactions with schools, universities and other groups. Personal fears have often had to be overcome in leading these. As well as sharing our convictions, many of the group have been deeply impacted by the passion and conviction of individuals and NGO groups living by faith.

Being one of the 'crazy' participants myself, I am questioning many personal and societal expectations. Meeting people who are tackling global issues at a grass-roots level brings my concept of career and success into question. Easily pessimistic, I find it a challenge to search for hope around and inside myself to share with those we meet.

Trying to operate as an inclusive unit is a continuous challenge; the path of living according to one's own understanding and decisions is always attractive. However, I am learning that teamwork is not so much about finding consensus, but rather having the flexibility and creativity to work with different points of view. Finally, being part of a group that is more interested in knowing how I am correcting where I have gone wrong, rather than how good or nice I am is quite a novel experience.

While it is debatable what our sanity levels will be by the completion of the programme, being with AFL is something I definitely won't regret.

**Sarah Wood, New Zealand**

The idea of joining Action For Life was appealing to me because I wanted to have an absolutely fresh look at the things I was doing; I was working with the anti-corruption NGO Transparency International and was deeply involved in Church activities. I also wanted to learn as much as possible from the different people and cultures we would meet about conflict resolution, how strong families are built

and how broken families can be brought together again. I wanted to acquire the ability to interest young people in moral values, and to bring this skill to Latvia, my country.

I have experienced several significant personal changes during the programme: learning to move from the prison of fear to the house of love, daring to use my talents, and giving up the desire to please everyone. Being amongst Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims has taught me to find out as much as possible about the place one is going

to in order to understand the culture, and to have deep talks with people.

The greatest joy so far has been the totally understanding and non-judgmental attitude of most of the team and the ability to pray together for personal and group needs (even in the middle of the night). I have met some fantastic people, as well as learning the art of real hospitality in India and South-East Asia. I have also seen manifestations of natural and human-built beauty during our excursions to the countryside, cities and places of worship.

Just for balance, there were also moments which brought less joy. Such as situations when I didn't agree with what had been decided, and therefore could not do my best. I constantly felt privileged to be with people who have values and to be living in such good conditions (food, lodging, an interesting schedule and free time too). However, at times, it

**it made me wonder what exactly we had to give when interacting with people surrounded by difficulties and problems we don't experience**

made me wonder what exactly we had to give when interacting with people surrounded by difficulties and problems we don't experience.

After AFL I hope to work for an NGO in Central Europe, using all the values and skills obtained during this programme. In the future I would like to organise creative activities tapping into the huge talent and potential of South-East Europe, thus doing my bit to bring harmony to the region.

**Ildze Slanke, Latvia**



Wadiaa Khoury, Lebanon



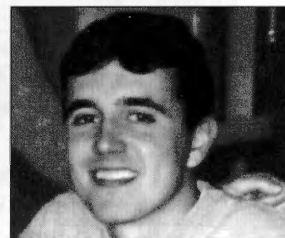
Nigel Heywood, Australia



Sharon Hopkins, Canada



Nabnita Jit, India



Zeb Simpson, USA



Indian children love having their picture taken! Photo: Fiona Leggat

**A**fter three weeks in Jamshedpur, India, meeting ordinary people doing extraordinary things and with so many stories to share with us, we landed in Kolkata (Calcutta). What an inspiration that was! We worked with a lot of youngsters who through tremendous change in themselves are now working towards the betterment of their community.

Kohima, Nagaland, to me was like home away from home—their lifestyle, the food they eat and how they conduct their church services. In fact there are a lot of similarities between South Africa and this wonderful place in the North-East of India. When I heard a few stories from the Elders it reminded me of what I went through as a child during the 80s. The

## I spent a day in jail and was released after my father begged on his knees for hours

police came to my house one night looking for my second eldest brother (who is now HIV positive), could not find him and decided to take me instead. They informed my father that to get me back they should bring my brother and I would be free. I was thrown in the back of a police van and while they were driving at 80 km/h, they suddenly opened the door and told me to jump. I didn't but got a few 'klaps'. I spent a day in jail and was released after my father begged on his knees for hours. I have found forgiveness within me for all that has happened in my country but I will never forget. When I left home I felt inadequate but now I feel different—ready to face any responsibility, within my family, my community and my rainbow nation.

I am looking forward to going back and doing something for my country, especially in reconciliation. I feel that the TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission) did not meet its expectations and that it

did not go deep enough into the hearts of South Africans, black and white, and people of other colour. One thing I am learning here in Nagaland is that forgiveness has to come from the heart and we have to seek forgiveness beyond justice. I am convinced that a lot of the blacks are still trapped in the past and that many whites are omissive. How can we play our role in remedying our beloved country?

**Amos Mgeleza Seyama, South Africa**

**D**eciding to take part in Action For Life was easy. I wasn't studying, and had recently left a job I did not miss at all. I was getting desperate in my search for more than life seemed to be offering me. For a few years I had been feeling alone and depressed, and didn't see much point to just living for the sake of my own existence. Only after reaching my lowest point did I decide to return home, which led to my hearing about AFL.

There were only two real difficulties in deciding to join. One was my feeling of inadequacy—I thought they were looking for 'good people,' and I doubted I had the self-motivation or dedication to fit into that category. Then there was the fear of my own potential, should I seriously dedicate my life to God and His works—and of the personal sacrifices I would need to make if I took such a decision. These feelings are often present, and there is a lot more I need to hand over to God before coming close to what I consider a 'good person', or before beginning to use this potential.

AFL has given me a new perspective on the world. My faith has grown enormously, as I have given myself time to study and understand the Christian tradition I was raised in. India has taught me that there is much more to life than I had previously thought. It is now possible to imagine living a life based on what little faith I have, and trusting in God (whose existence I still cannot be sure of). The possibility of a life based on trust seems less like a childish dream and more like a potential future for me.

So far this has been the adventure of a lifetime, meeting people I would not have dreamed of, and sharing in their life stories and experiences. Often though, I have felt we are not doing enough to repay

**the possibility of a life based on trust seems less like a childish dream and more like a potential future for me**

what we have been given. At the same time, I find it difficult to know how to go about this. When I feel down, it is often because I feel we aren't being as effective as we could be—internal conflicts and different agendas lessen our effectiveness, and I am as responsible for this as anyone.

Despite the difficulties, I have no regrets. There are things I would have done differently, but the wealth of experience and personal change I wouldn't sacrifice for anything. There have been so many invaluable lessons and so many people who have irrevocably changed my outlook on life. I am even learning to seek the good in the people I find most difficult! Hope is beginning to mean something to me and I have started looking forward to discovering what the future holds...

**Laura Vertigan, Australia**

**A**ction For Life is hard to describe. It's a training programme and yet it's so much more. Before joining it all seemed so far away—exotic countries, cultures and timezones. In fact, I was a bit scared. I have never lived in community before and the idea of living with 30 people of different backgrounds was daunting. But nothing could have prepared me for this.

During the first two months I often reflected on the previous four to five years of my life. I thought I knew it all—where I was heading and what was ahead. But I guess this was just a mask to cover my uncertainties and worries. I thought I had realised this but India forced me to re-evaluate. I had to re-think who I am, what my life is about and what I have to give. To be painfully frank, not much.

I had to accept I still had that mask on and was repeating the same mantra: 'I know it all' (meaning 'I am always right!'). This was a time when I was highly vulnerable. Tension within myself created tensions with others, but there were lessons to be learnt from this. And I think it was then that I started my search for something higher, for something like faith. Coming from a non-religious background this was a new discovery for me.

There were many learning opportunities. Sometimes living within our team was difficult: different people from different cultures have different habits, opinions and lifestyles. This presented many challenges but they have done their job. I slowly started learning, and felt my gratitude towards my teammates grow more and more. It's a strange feeling to describe.

Now that we are in the middle of the programme I realise that everything had value, and it was all worth it. A man who was soon to become a monk

said to me that sometimes things happen and you don't know the reason, but the reason is always there. I think I agree with that. All of my inner struggles led me to new understandings and what's more important, to searching for my new goal in life. One thing is for sure—I have been blessed to be taught in

**I had to re-think who I am, what my life is about and what I have to give. To be painfully frank, not much**

this way. The amazing experiences with this group have made my life more meaningful. I thank God.

**Oleg Ermurati, Moldova**

**I**n 1997 after my high school graduation, I went overseas to attend a conference entitled 'Life, Faith, Fellowship'. Very quickly, I realised that this journey was not only about being in an aeroplane and heading to another country, but also, about travelling within and heading to a better me. One reason for this was that I was given the chance to travel with Muslim compatriots and got to know them better, which freed me from many prejudices.

It made me realise that the Christian city in which I'd grown up had become a kind of comfort zone. That's why it was so difficult for me to move to Beirut for my university studies, because I knew that my class would be full of different religious denominations.

I joined Action For Life because I wanted some time to think about the real purpose of my life, and so began another journey. Over a period of five months in India we've interacted with 15 thousand students. I have been particularly influenced by people who have initiated community services and reconciliation processes by trusting their 'inner voice'.

The basic lesson I've learnt, is that absolute love is



Dhobi laundrymen in Mumbai, India, Photo: Chloe Smith

the common ground for all faiths and religions, so the only way to sort out my region's problems (or any problem) is to think and act according to this absolute. As a Christian, the AFL journey has helped me to understand my own faith, to begin acting like a daughter of God, and not like a slave of my fears. I learnt then that absolute love can be applied in every situation as a means to solving any problem. In other words, to allow ourselves to look at things through God's eyes! Only this can release people from the religious conflicts in my region (and elsewhere in the world) and help them rise above concern over which religion is best, and which piece of land most sacred,

Seven months have passed since the beginning of Action For Life. It seems a lifetime ago, a blur of images, snatched incidents and half memories.

**my head, heart and eyes have never been stretched so wide and I feel as though I have woken up after 25 years**

Packing bags, meeting new people, trying to understand the local currency, being moved to tears and laughing. Missing home, looking at the light splay through ruined temples as trees climb over stones, and feeling guilty for not paying a legless beggar. Hearing stories of torture, hope, and old philosophies made new, seeing changes of love where there was only despair. My head, heart and eyes have never been stretched so wide and I feel as though I have woken up after 25 years.

To step from my run-of-the-mill life (assembling picture frames) into an adventure in India, Cambodia, Thailand and Malaysia was no great sacrifice, and suddenly I was 16 again and anything was possible. I met a strange group of people who soon became friends and then family. Good friends are like springboards and as we hastily prepared to meet India I took great strength from the people in AFL. Their loving care, convictions and personal faith all served to strengthen my own and I felt a trust

towards each of them that we were better as a team than we were on our own.

Travelling on the sleeper train up to Nagaland I was excited and exhausted. We had become so busy that the long train trips staring out into the passing countryside were a great opportunity to stop and get some thinking done. My head was so full I thought it might explode. I was struggling with many ideas but mainly with the notion that each of us must find our own path in order to contribute properly to the group. I wondered what obstacles were blocking me from walking my own path. It was much easier just to look at the countryside than to name them, but they confronted me anyway.

As we walked into Thetsumi village in Nagaland, listening to the haunting singing coming from the long line of men in traditional dress, my busy mind completely stopped. It was such a moving experience; all I could do in that moment was accept it. All through India people gave so freely of what they had, big or small, that to accept such hospitality was a challenge in itself. Many times I wanted to slip by



Local slum children in Mumbai, India, Photo: Fiona Leggat

to the concern about how to be united with God.

My wish is to transmit this message to many friends in need, but also to people I may not be able to reach in the Middle East. My hope is that the same inner voice which has guided some to reconciliation will also guide others. And since the only valuable change is that which begins with oneself, I am very happy to open my heart for a more transparent

**the AFL journey helped me to understand my own faith, to begin acting like a daughter of God, and not like a slave of my fears**

friendship with my Muslim friends, not only to enjoy peaceful coexistence, but to invest in it as a message for Lebanon's future.

**Wadiaa Khoury, Lebanon**



unnoticed but people's willingness to engage, give what they had and receive what we offered, brought me back to reality. I cannot always return such generosity but must work hard at passing it on.

Jump two months forward into Cambodia, I am performing a magic show to orphans in Battambang. Watching their eyes light up in the night and listening to their laughter I have never felt so worthy and fulfilled. How often, I thought, I do not give to others because of my self-doubt—even the smallest things I hold must be given. The next day they begged me to show them the trick of how to extend their arms, and the look of surprise when I showed them makes me laugh every time I think of it. Many times I have searched for guidance on a particular decision, when the decision should simply be to give.

In 50 years, perhaps, I will look back on this time and see that it was the start of many great things. A new faith, a new peace, friendships that change lives, and a realisation that when I pray God takes it far more seriously than I ever will.

**Nigel Heywood, Australia**

**W**hy have you joined Action For Life?' is a familiar question. I'd been struggling to find my path in life and here was a network of people living their lives according to their inner voice. As a Christian I was taught to pray but not to listen. I knew immediately AFL was what I was searching for. It offered me the chance to work in developing countries, to build my leadership skills, and to leave my materialistic life in Canada.

For the last seven months travelling through India, Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam, I have been working on my goals daily, and have had to add patience to the list. From day to day you don't know what you'll be doing and where you'll be living. This has not been easy, but I'm learning to be more open and flexible.

In the beginning it was difficult to live and work with such a diverse group of individuals. We couldn't



Navigating the traffic, Photo: Fiona Leggat

always appreciate our differences, and at times I don't think we wanted to either. We've come closer by sharing stories, working side by side, and resolving conflicts truthfully, enabling us to overcome most problems, and actually enjoy each other's differences.

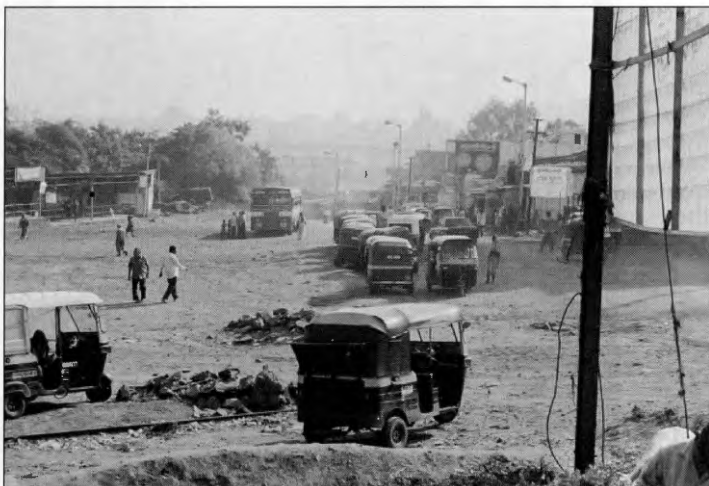
Another personal highlight was the time I discovered that I could speak to over a thousand people. I asked God to stand beside me and speak through me, and I lost my fear. On another occasion the thought came to me, 'I'll never want if I give'. This has challenged me to give up my selfishness and really give my life over to God.

If you are looking for an adventure and a new

**money can not solve the world's problems, but one person with a vision, who is willing to share that vision, and is not afraid of hardship, can**

outlook on life AFL is definitely for you! If you like to travel first class and know exactly what you're doing you might want to think twice. I'll never again be able to view the world in the same light. My blinkers have been stripped away. I now know money can not solve the world's problems, but one person with a vision, who is willing to share that vision, and is not afraid of hardship, can. I've met these people, I've been inspired by these people, and I want to be one of these people.

**Sharon Hopkins, Canada**



Auto-rickshaws in Pune, India, Photo: Chloe Smith

**A**s the train pulled out of Bangalore Railway station and took me towards Pune, some thoughts struck me. I realised that for the better half of my life I have been vying for acknowledgement, attention and appreciation. But while leaving my friends from Action For Life behind, although I felt immense sadness, strangely enough I did

not feel lonely. For the first time I really felt I did not have to consciously work towards gaining someone's love and care—it will always be there for me. Their small gestures of friendship have touched my life in a way that nothing else has, and reinforced my faith in bonding across ethnicities, prejudices and differences. For the first time I feel valuable and truly valued as a friend.

The past months with AFL can best be described as a cornerstone in the journey of my life.

**exchanging ideas, life experiences and working together with the team has not only enriched my soul, but has elevated my faith in our struggle for the betterment of mankind**

Exchanging ideas, life experiences and working together with the team has not only enriched my soul, but has elevated my faith in our struggle for the betterment of mankind. I feel courageous and confident enough not to give in to the easy way out of a challenging situation, instead I will face it with conviction and faith.

***Nabnita Jit, India***

India—a billion people, one sixth of the world's population, living in a country one-third the size of my homeland, the United States of America. One might ask, 'What can one person do to make a difference when you are just one in a billion?' This is a question that the Action For Life team addressed as we interacted with school children, college students, industry executives, and NGOs. I am fortunate to have met many individuals who are showing the world just what one in a billion can do.

AFL taught me the value of expanding my awareness and called me to understand my Christian faith in the light of constructive action. Expanding one's awareness is vital to becoming an effective leader and instrument for change: 'The opening of awareness stocks both the conscious and unconscious mind with a richness of resources for future need. But it does more than that: it is value building and value clarifying and it armors one to meet the stress of life by helping build serenity in the face of uncertainty... Awareness is not a giver of solace—it is just the opposite. It is a disturber and an awakener. Able leaders are usually sharply awake and reasonably disturbed. They are not seekers after solace. They have their own inner solace' (Robert Greenleaf, *The Servant As Leader*).

Americans and many around the world were disturbed and awakened by the tragic events of September 11. That day changed my country and



Photo: Fiona Leggat



## India can teach the world the value of simplicity and care for others

my perspective dramatically. Shortly afterwards I was faced with a decision on whether or not to travel and participate in AFL. After examining my fears and motivations I felt convicted that it was necessary for me to be the one American to participate. The need to show love instead of fear, and solidarity rather than division, was more important than ever. The decision to go to India meant leaving comforts and taking risks, but the so-called security I left behind gave me a freedom that I believe is what Christ calls me to live in.

India is a land of many contrasts, and though it faces many problems, it is a country that can teach the world the value of simplicity and care for others. Among the new truths I discovered, that value of simplicity and care for others is what my Indian friends helped me to understand. Former President Jimmy Carter is a man who has taken the challenge to 'be the one' who will take a stand and make a difference in his country and in the world. As he says, 'The problems may seem insurmountable, but they are not. We have the tools; we have the brilliant dedicated people to find the answers. All we need is a sense of sharing and the will to change. The will can grow from understanding. Once we understand, we can care, and once we care, we can change' (National Geographic, February 2002). His words ring true to me as I feel forever changed by the new understandings I gained and those I grew to love among the billion people on the other side of the world.

**Zeb Simpson, USA**

## GE SUBSCRIPTIONS

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*For details of rates in other countries please contact us at the Global Express address (page 3)*

...in Albania

# WIRED FOR

## 'What's happened to you? You are different!'

The communist system in Albania began in 1947 and collapsed in 1991. In 1963, the dictator, Enver Hoxha, outlawed religion. The constitution was changed to declare Albania an Atheist State. It is the only country in the world to have done that. Mosques and churches were closed and turned into store houses or sports halls. Hundreds were destroyed.

Albania has had ten years of democracy. We still have a lot of problems. Last winter we only had electricity for two hours a day. My sister and I had to study at night by candlelight, which was a strain on the eyes. At the university there was often no power for the computers, which affected studies.

We live on the fifth floor of an old block of flats. When I was a small girl I can remember carrying water up from the ground floor in buckets. Even now the water pressure never seems to fill the tank on the roof. Ninety percent of the time we carry water up for the seven of us in our flat. I know there are places in the world where people have no electricity or water, so we must consider ourselves fortunate and be grateful.

The wonderful thing in Albania now is that we do have freedom. That is a precious thing because for 46 years under communism and before that seven years under Mussolini and Hitler we did not have it. Now we are free we can travel outside Albania.

My grandparents are Muslims. During the communist time Ramadan fasting was not allowed. They had to take sandwiches to the fields in case the overseer questioned them. But in all of 40 years they never once failed to fast secretly. I love and admire them for their faith and courage. It held them through dark years.

My own journey of faith started when I was at high school. A friend asked me to go with her to a new church

starting in Tirana. I enjoyed it. After some time though I felt my life was a mess and dirty. I asked some friends to pray with me. In that prayer I gave my life to God. Next day at school several people asked, 'What's happened to you? You are different!'

Later, a close friend of my parents began telling us about the work of Initiatives of Change. I was fascinated by the idea of the absolute principles of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love and the fact that God can speak to us through the inner voice. I began to experience it myself. Keen to know more I attended an international conference at Caux, the Initiatives of Change centre in Switzerland in the summer of 1998.

When I returned to Caux in 2001 I was asked to speak on the value of a regular quiet time. For me this means reading the Bible, praying, and then writing down the thoughts and direction God puts into my mind. I explained, 'Mathematicians down the ages have been exploring into Mathematics. That is what I am doing now in Higher Mathematics at Tirana University. But there is another more important exploration I am making—exploring into God'. Quiet times help me very much. Through them God gives me the courage to overcome fears and other problems.

One problem I had was with worrying. I prayed about it a lot, but not much happened. Then last summer at Caux I felt worry was suddenly being lifted off me. It was a gift and God gave it in His own time. Of course, I am not totally free from worries. They sometimes come. But they no longer get a grip of me as they used to. Prayer now quickly restores my peace of heart. And through listening to God my confidence grows and I learn to trust Him more.



**Eglantina Xhaja, Albania**

### WHAT - U - THINK

Next issue we look at: **What are your views on co-habitation?**

Deadline: **October 15, 2002**

This issue: **What does prayer mean to you?**

#### **Arun Sheth, India**

Prayer to me is food for the soul. It is a communion with my higher self, the true self—minus the superficial trappings of the material world. When I pray in the early hours of the morning and in the still of the night, I can feel an all-encompassing warmth that envelopes me. This feeling irons out the creases of the day and makes me feel balanced,

equanimous and thankful for the wonderful experience of being alive.

While there are millions of Gods and Goddesses in the Hindu pantheon, prayer to my mind is not necessarily extolling any particular deity. Though I do recite the hymns in glory of some of them, I am happy to just be. Be with my higher self, the universal force, the divine who, according to the Vedic philosophy, is omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient.

Prayer time to me is sending out and receiving benevolent vibrations from all around. It is also asking for divine help in difficult areas, being thankful for strengths granted and asking forgiveness for errors committed. It also means feeling a

# CHANGE

...in Japan

## 'This was the beginning of a life of real promiscuity'

In the 1950's there were very few foreigners in Tokyo, so my brothers and I stood out like sore thumbs. I liked all the attention. One day a small boy pointed at me and screamed 'American!' I was confused and went to my mother. I found out that I am half-Japanese and half-Austrian. From then on, whenever I felt frustrated about being 'half', my mother would tell me that I was lucky to have two cultures. Despite this, I longed to be 'full'.

Living in Japan as a 'half' person is like one ugly duckling among many cute swans. I was quite fortunate though because I was never seriously bullied. However wherever I went, people would either try to speak to me in English or tell me how fluent my Japanese was. This was difficult because Japanese has always been my mother tongue.

Growing up, I felt I had to gain the approval of others. This I believe was the reason for promiscuous behaviour later in life. I had to have a man in my life all the time. My motives were to entice them into bed and thus gain their approval, which would raise my self-esteem. These relationships never worked even though I made myself believe I was in love.

I met my ex-husband in Chicago as a student. I desperately wanted to stay in the USA. The reason I went there was to escape from the environment I have described above, and to get away from my controlling mother. He was the perfect solution. First I thought I was the only person who could help this desperate soul who was so depressed. The second motive was to get married so that I could stay. I convinced myself that I loved him and we eloped. I was completely disowned by my family.

The first two years were great fun even though my husband was experimenting with drugs. He was unable to keep a job for more than three months. For seven years it

was an emotional roller coaster. I became depressed and tried to commit suicide. Fortunately, my pastor sent me to hospital. One month in a mental ward was a frightening experience and motivated me to get better fast. Two years later, despite marriage counselling, I left my husband. My father had passed away suddenly so I went to live with my mother in Japan.

Soon after my return, I started to work in television. This was the beginning of a life of real promiscuity. It became a game, and I hurt many people including my mother. Most of all I hurt myself: I contracted an incurable but not life threatening venereal disease. Years later I found a faith. Putting others before myself, I discovered, is the route to contentment.

My family and friends have been a tremendous support. At 82 my mother is my top mentor. I would like to add that my bi-racial background is now a positive. I do not feel different, because now I know that we are all God's children—we are all 'full' people.

**Marianne Wada, Japan**

*Marianne co-ordinates an international youth fellowship called Global Friends. You are warmly invited to their International Youth Gathering in Japan (August 30-September 1, 2002) which will be an opportunity to learn about different cultures and find common ground.*

*E-mail:*

*Marianne@mb.newweb.ne.jp.*



sense of fraternity with my near and dear ones, within my professional relations, and with my nation and the entire human race. As Swami Vivekananda has put it, 'In the heart of the cremation ground, we have planted the panchvati. Under its shade, we will unite the hundred crores\* of this world.'

(\*crore = 10 million)

**Daniel J. Cashmore, Australia**

On one hand prayer is sanctuary and peace, a quiet time, a thought inspired by an event propelling one into deep thought. Prayer is personal. Prayer is sacred. Prayer is something you cannot touch but can feel engulfing your

entire body, spirit and mind. Prayer is divine as it is communication with one's creator. It is cleansing, enriching and comforting.

Moreover, prayer is the connection and communication with other people. It is about serving G-d 'with all your heart and all your mind and all your soul' (Deuteronomy, 10:13). Prayer is truth, a pathway to self-improvement and self-actualization. Prayer helps me to put things into perspective, to remember what is truly sacred. Prayer is the showing of my love of G-d and my love and respect of life. Prayer can be aloud, it can be thought, it can be practiced whilst alone or as a member of a congregation. Prayer is a ritual and the

# Manchester - Melbourne

**T**he first time Manchester-born Bhavesh Patel tried to get into Moldova he was thrown off a train in the middle of the night.

He had just crossed the Romanian border and there were visa complications. The party he was travelling with prayed about it (he thought this was a joke) and after eight hours, guarded by soldiers, they were happily making their way to Chisinau, the capital, for a New Year Youth gathering organised by Foundations For Freedom. A few years later he returned to work with the NGO 'New Civilisation'—the group of young Moldovans who, inspired by Initiatives of Change, are experimenting with the idea of personal change leading to wider, societal change.

So what motivates the 27 year old, geology graduate for whom the poorest country in Europe has been home for the last year or more? Patel has guts. As the only Indian at school he was bullied and yet, despite being attacked twice and having regular verbal abuse he loves his city Manchester; 'The architecture, the amazing music scene and vibe—it's just a cool place to be.'

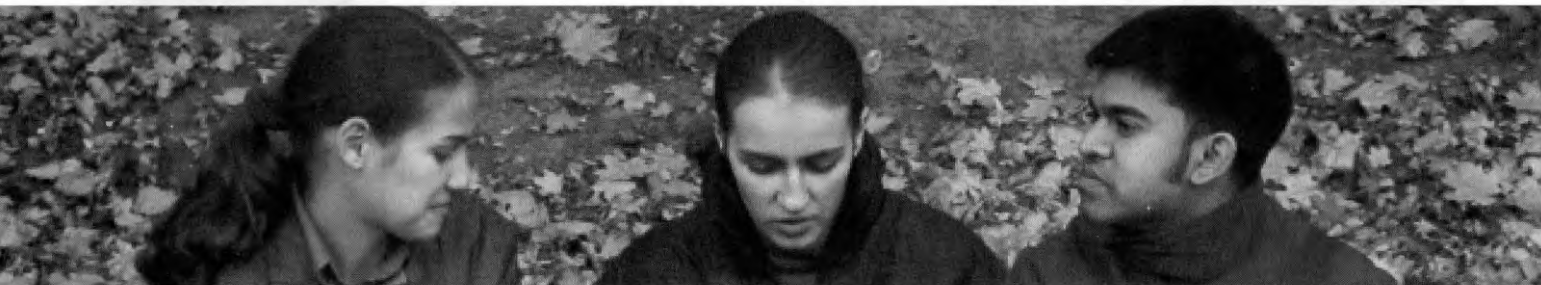
It was there that he met an older couple who fuelled his interest in the work of Initiatives of Change. Their particular focus was Eastern Europe. After several encounters with other projects they were involved with in England and Switzerland, Patel took the brave step of giving up his job at a bank to travel round the UK facilitating sessions with high school students. The themes of these interactive sessions ranged from 'Finding

a purpose in life' to 'What motivates me?'

With the dawn of the new millennium came an invitation from Australia. Patel was asked to help out with a training programme for young adults called 'Effective Living' to be held at the Asia Pacific Centre for Initiatives of Change in Melbourne. This was an offer he would be 'mad' to refuse. In fact his six months downunder turned out to be 'life-changing'. This was largely due to the one-to-one care he received from Jim Coulter, a former World War Two pilot who became his spiritual mentor. It was tough care. They met weekly and Coulter invited him to examine his life in the light of moral standards of absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness and love. He 'started to get his own house in order' by writing to his parents to express his love for them and to 'let them in' to his life. A noticeable improvement in their relationship ensued.

On another occasion Coulter asked, 'What are you most ashamed of?' At the time Patel could only cope with sharing the second most shameful thing. The question lived with him for the next one and a half years. It became harder to ignore shortly after he moved to Moldova. Looking back at the initial period in Moldova he can see that he was rather low.

Though risky, he knew that basing in Chisinau to be alongside his Moldovan friends had been the right move. The first month living with a family was wonderful and the team could not have been more supportive. The second month when he moved into his own place, reality hit hard. Not being able to speak the language (Romanian) was a big handicap especially when he was



Bhavesh Patel (right) in discussion with members of New Civilisation, Photos: Ward Vandewege

## WHAT - U - THINK

purification of one's soul. To me it is the opening of the heart in the most beautiful manner humanly possible.

### **Kamran Naqui, UK**

As I prepare for prayer, I first commence with my ablutions (the Arabic term is wudhu) which consist of washing the face, arms and wiping of the head and feet. I use this opportunity to think of what it is that compels me to pray. After belief in God (Tawheed), Salaat is the second most important pillar of Islam and the five daily prayers consist of

Fajr, Zuhr, Asr, Maghrib and Isha. Respectively, the dawn, early and late afternoon, dusk and night prayers.

For me prayer is a great place to have a one-to-one, to make an appeal, to help me accept my situation or to give thanks. Where I see others desperately trying to reach out, prayer enables me to reach in and find strength when I feel I have little. Whether I feel His presence around me or not, prayer is the smallest, most personal method I know of that allows me to communicate my thoughts and feelings to Allah.

# - Moldova

out on his own. He felt alone, and awed by the challenge that lay before him. The students were already looking to him for advice and leadership both practically and spiritually.

He began to recall instances in people's lives when, at their most desperate, they had felt God speak most clearly. Simultaneously, he became more aware of his own weaknesses and the dark sides of his character. He finally dealt with 'the question' and wrote a letter of apology to a friend. A month later he received a 'Thank You'—a sense of inner freedom followed. He knew his action had helped the other person too.

The quality of friendship which Patel received from his 'Aussie' mentor, greatly impacted his approach to his work with the Moldovans. Although impossible to be the best friend of every member of a thirty-strong team, he tried where possible to be available for people on a one-to-one basis. This led to two of the team taking part in Action For Life (see cover story), something they would never dreamed of doing without his conviction and encouragement. His week consisted of the management and organisation of the group from planning meetings and spiritual evenings to English lessons.

The mission statement of 'New Civilisation' is 'to bring positive change into society by personal example, and through activities promoting spiritual growth.' To this end, they have had a 'Think and Vote Campaign' to raise awareness amongst students of the importance of their vote. Others took on to visit an orphanage regularly culminating in a big party for the children. One of the next projects is to determine the feasibility of a consulting agency to support the ventures of young entrepreneurs.

Life in a country as poor as this one 'makes you put everything into perspective', says Patel. The gritty determination of the youth there, in the face of poverty and corruption, has been a real inspiration to him. The main lesson he has learnt is that life is a struggle, life is difficult. 'But,' he concludes, 'the saints got on with it and we have to too.'

**Laura Trevelyan, UK**



A good friend told Patel that weather is psychological. He laughed. After Moldova he agrees.

## **Anna Christine Christensen, Denmark**

'Life is only for love, time is only that we may find God.' This was written by Bernard of Clairvaux in the 1100s. In a way it catches an essence of what prayer means to me: to be still in order that the love of my Creator may be able to enter my heart so that I may be able to pass it on to others. Once I take the time to be still and open my heart to God, it is as if I am taken on a journey of discovery. New landscapes open up before me and I am amazed and enriched. Sometimes I thank God, sometimes I tell of worries, and at

times I ask for help or wisdom, either for myself or for others. Prayer to me is very much like a conversation—one where I need to remember that the journey only really gets going once I take the time to listen as well as to speak. South American, Dom Helder Camara said something along the lines of: Lord, make me a puddle that mirrors a corner of Your sky. Puddles cannot mirror anything unless their surface is still, and my heart is often torn by storms. Prayer to me is entering into the stillness that enables the sky to show its image in me—if only for brief moments.

# POSITIVE POWER

"Can Bono Save the World?  
Don't laugh - the world's  
biggest rock star is on a  
mission to make a difference."

[TIME MAGAZINE]



It's extraordinary but it seems to be true. According to articles in The Guardian and Time magazine, Bono, the U2 rock star has had a key part in the changing of American policy on Poor World issues. He went to see President Bush prior to the UN summit on development aid

in Monterrey, Mexico. He came away with a commitment by Bush to increase US aid by \$5bn a year. Bush's announcement astonished development experts. They had already written obituaries for Monterrey, blaming US unilateralism for killing it off. Justin Forsyth of

Oxfam said of the summit, 'The good news is that rich countries are now moving forward by pledging new aid. The bad news is they are not moving fast enough'.

Bono says, 'I went to Washington to get a cheque and I'm going back to get a bigger one'. The U2 star knows that to close the Rich World-Poor World Gap in time, America has to be convinced. He and Bob Geldof have planned intelligently and strategically how to lobby Washington. They made themselves expert in Poor World economics. Geldof said that for a summer they had a high-level tutorial until they knew it all backwards. Bono went on an eight-day trip in January to Uganda, Malawi and Ghana with the influential Harvard economist, Jeffrey Sachs. He sat on a panel with Bill Gates of Microsoft and Paul O'Neill, the US Treasury Secretary, on the effectiveness of aid at the World Economic Forum in New York. Later, with officials of the Gates Foundation and the Episcopal Church, he planned how to take forward the DATA (Debt, Aid, Trade in Africa) Campaign.

Earlier the US wing of Jubilee 2000 hit on the idea of persuading the Nigerian President Obasanjo, a Baptist, to write a letter to the Baptist Churches across the southern US states—the Bible Belt—explaining the biblical principles behind debt



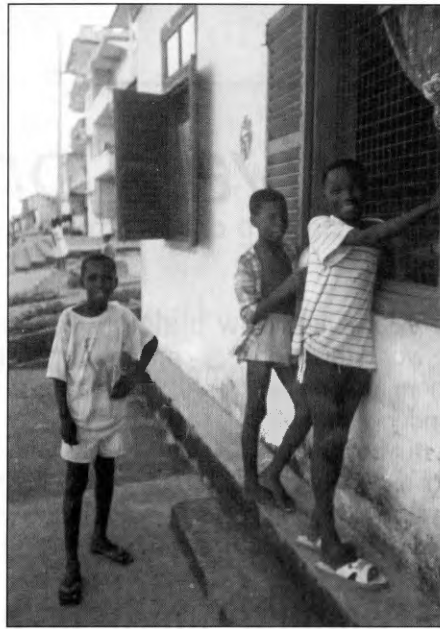
U2, Photos this page courtesy of BMG/Island Records



cancellation. Suddenly, Bono found he had access to a swathe of strongly Christian Republicans compelled by the biblical theme of his pitch. 'I went to people like Jesse Helms (the senior Republican senator), who had been very tough on the concept of foreign assistance and very bleak on AIDs. He's a religious man, so I told him that 2103 verses of scripture pertain to poverty. I quoted that verse of Mathew 25, 'I was naked and you clothed me.' He was really moved, he was in tears'. A Guardian editorial says, 'President Bush with help from an unlikely axis of good between the rock star Bono and right-wing Christian senators appears to have belatedly embraced the notion that aid can alleviate disease and poverty in a time of plenty'.

In Europe it was the crowds of ordinary people, church people in their thousands, trade union members too, who moved Jubilee 2000 forward. This did not happen in America but Time says September 11 changed the way Americans think about international affairs. Far from Washington—at church coffee mornings and student discussion groups—issues of global health care, education and poverty are being discussed with a new urgency. 'Bono understands,' says Neilson of the Gates Foundation, 'that the battle for development is going to be won at the backyard barbecue, not at the Council on Foreign Relations.' At the same time Bono is tackling Washington. He had an early morning session with 30 Republican Congressmen. 'I am not willing to give up on the Republicans. They are tough but they are willing to listen.' US Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill, who at first refused to meet him, extended their session from 30 minutes to 90. Now O'Neill has agreed to go on a tour of Africa with Bono to examine debt relief. O'Neill says, 'He's a serious person. He cares deeply about these issues and you know what? He knows a lot about them.'

Bono has met Colin Powell, US Secretary of State, George Soros the financier, and earlier the then President Bill Clinton. He refrains from talking about Africa as an



Sekondi, Ghana, Photos this page: Effie Jordan

emotional issue. 'We don't argue compassion. We put it in the most crass terms possible, we argue it as a financial and security issue for America. There are potentially 10 Afghanistans in Africa, and it is cheaper by a factor of 100 to prevent fires from happening than to put them out.' Bono wants his vision for Africa to be as enduring and effective for future generations as the Marshall plan was for earlier ones. 'You still find people of my parents' age talking about the Marshall Plan. That was where Europe felt the grace of America.'

His commitment to Africa started in 1984 when U2 took part in Geldof's Band Aid and Live Aid. Bono and his wife Alison spent six weeks working at an orphanage in Wello, Ethiopia, at the height of the famine. 'You'd walk out of your tent in the morning and you'd count the bodies of dead and abandoned children. Or worse, the father of a child would walk up and try to give you his living child and say 'You take it, because if it is your child it won't die.' '

Bono and U2 are household names in America. They are probably the only band still recording after two decades and managing to stay fashionable. Their album 'Beautiful Day' was regarded as a sort of balm for America after September 11, the song 'Walk On' especially. This year they won four Grammy Awards. Bono sang at the Superbowl half-time show for a TV audience of 130 million. He says, 'When you sing you make people vulnerable to change in their lives. You make yourself vulnerable to change in your life. But in the end you've got to become the change you want to see in the world. I'm actually not a very good example of that but still I know it's true.'

**Alec Porter, Scotland**



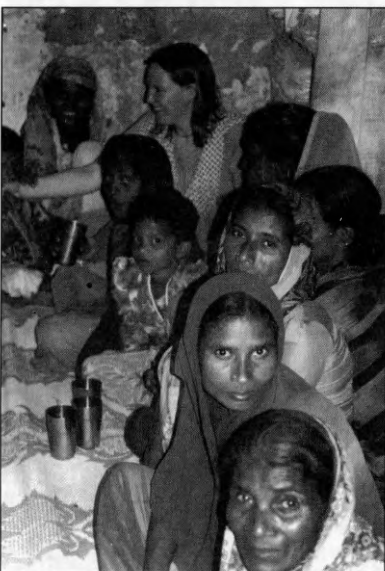
YWCA event in Accra, Ghana – Bono's recent tour of Africa with US Treasury Secretary, Paul O'Neill, will impact Bush and the forthcoming G8 Summit in Canada.

# religions *rivals or allies?*

**A**re different religions rivals or allies?' In the light of the spiritual struggle going on in the world this is an increasingly important question. There are obvious differences between us in theological understanding as well as practice, and there always will be. But beyond this I ask myself whether there is a common experience of finding inner liberation that is at the heart of all the great religions. For instance some Muslim friends tell me that though many in the West fear the word 'Jihad', first and foremost it means facing the evil in oneself. This is the 'Greater Jihad'. Is this basically the same inner struggle that a Christian, or a Buddhist, or a Hindu, or a Jew, or a spiritually motivated non-religious person would experience when confronted by the downdrag of human nature?

It must have been a temptation for Mahatma Gandhi to take the seeming shortcut of bitterness and violence to gain Indian independence from the British. But he was out for something greater—the spiritual growth in his own people as well as in the British. As recent Hindu-Muslim riots

have shown, this is a continuing need. But it interests me that Gandhi, a Hindu had gained inspiration from Jesus' submission on the cross. Then later, Martin Luther King Jr, a Christian, was influenced by how Gandhi had submitted to God's will. Truly spiritual people recognise and respond to the real thing in others, i.e. the surrendering of the self for a greater good.



Muslim women, India, Photo: Fiona Leggat

**I ask myself whether there is a common experience of finding inner liberation that is at the heart of all the great religions. Some Muslim friends tell me that though many in the West fear the word 'Jihad', first and foremost it means facing the evil in oneself. This is the 'Greater Jihad'.**

We may all have different theological beliefs concerning the 'truth' of the religions that are precious to us; but is the real need to highlight the surrender of self which enables transformation? Three years ago my wife and I were with a group from our church that visited the Holy Land. In the Garden of Gethsemane I was struck by a small plaque which said: 'My Father, I do not understand You but I trust You'. I take Jesus' struggle in the Garden as

a genuinely human struggle. It led to physical and mental agony on the cross. It also made a massive impact on world history. But do the obedience of Abraham, the Greater Jihad of the Prophet Mohammed, the non-self in the Enlightenment of the Buddha, or the non-

violent discipline of Gandhi's struggle all have a similar spiritual heart to them? I am not referring to theological theories here (important as they may be) because theories can so easily divide. What unites is genuine experience that we can all identify with.

So, 'Are different religions rivals or allies?' If we see ourselves as rivals we will doubtless end up with more and more atrocities. As allies we can move forward with the common desire to find inner liberation ourselves and helping others to do that too. We then have the basis to reach out together to bring much needed changes in society.

A Muslim friend of mine in India is the founder and director of an Urdu-speaking girls' school in a slum. He writes: 'As educators in the business of building and nurturing lives we must teach children to distinguish between a 'right cause' and a 'wrong cause'. The spiritual discipline required to battle feelings of hostility, rage, hatred, fear and terror will have to be inculcated and practised.' As a Christian I was grateful to be invited to do interactive sessions with students in this Muslim school and support my friend with his vision.

• A common calling of spiritually motivated people should surely be personality transformation. There has probably been no era in human history in which that is more urgently needed than today.

**Howard Grace, UK**

## God and I

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I asked God to take away my pain. God said, No.  
It is not for me to take away, but for you to give up.

I asked God to make my handicapped child whole. God said, No.  
Her spirit was whole; her body was only temporary.

I asked God to grant me patience. God said, No.  
Patience is a by-product of tribulations. It isn't granted; it is learned.

I asked God to give me happiness. God said, No.  
I give you blessings. Happiness is up to you.

I asked God to spare me pain. God said, No.  
Suffering draws you apart from worldly cares and brings you closer to me.

I asked God to make my spirit grow. God said, No.  
You must grow on your own, but I will prune you to make you fruitful.

I asked for all things that I might enjoy life. God said, No.  
I will give you life so that you may enjoy all things.

I asked God to help me love others as much as he loves me.  
God said... Ah, finally you have the idea.

# Scattered thoughts

Sales resistance is the triumph  
of mind over matter

I am not wedded to any dogma  
or religion but I do believe -  
whether one calls it religion or  
not - in the innate spirituality  
of human beings - Nehru

If we want to go wide,  
we have to go deep -  
Frank Buchman

Pray as you can, not as  
you can't

He who knows others is  
wise. He who knows  
himself is enlightened -  
Lao Tzu

Gratitude is the vigilance  
of the soul against the  
powers of destruction

Nobody notices what I do  
until I don't do it

If we don't change, we  
don't grow. If we don't  
grow, we aren't really  
living - Gail Sheehy

Love itself is what's  
left over when being in  
love has burned away -  
Louis de Bernieres

Trusting is the highest  
form of responsibility

That which is striking and  
beautiful is not always good, but  
that which is good is always  
beautiful - Ninon De L'englos

Humility means having a  
true estimate of yourself

A real leader faces the  
music, even when he/she  
doesn't like the tune

Take your life in your  
own hands and what  
happens? A terrible  
thing: no-one to  
blame - Erica Jong

I am closer to you than your  
jugular vein - The Koran

