

MANNA matters

Newsletter of MANNA GUM.



Practising organic resurrection! 'A Different Way' participants Heidi, Kelly, Simeon, Penny and Cudgee resident, Indigo, complete and beautify a compost pile as part of a compost making competition. Humus was the winner.

News from Manna Gum

At the end of September we had ten people come and join us for ***A Different Way***, an intensive live-in week exploring Christ's calling to a new way of living, jointly run by Manna Gum and TEAR.

Each day we explored a different theme such as salvation, creation, money, work, poverty and community, following a rhythm of singing and praying, Bible study, workshopping issues and practical work or activity. As well as having lots of conversations about subjects such as resource use, standards of living, budgetting, hospitality and ethical shopping, participants also found themselves making compost piles, planting trees for revegetation sites, sorting e-waste and urban gleaning!

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Although coming from different contexts and life stages, we were very impressed with how well everyone entered into the program, shared, worked together, and supported each other. This was our first go at running this week, but having had a go, we are now fairly convinced we will try and make this an annual event. Thanks to everyone who helped out with *A Different Way*.

Much of the rest of the winter was spent combing through Australian aid data for a research project on the delivery of Australian aid through the World Bank and Asian Development Bank. The finished report, ***Banking on Aid***, will be released early next year along with some public workshops - stay tuned ...

Photo by Glenn Daniels

From death to life

The economy of salvation

Jonathan Cornford

For many people, the journey into exploring the connections between faith and our way of life begins with a concern for social justice. The realisation that we are beneficiaries of structures that produce poverty and inequality in the world leads quite naturally to some soul searching for anyone who is interested in the teaching of Jesus. This then leads to the discovery of how much of the Biblical text is also concerned about this, and that it has particularly strong things to say to those of us at the top of the pyramid. This is as it should be.

However, the concern for justice is only part of the reason the Bible has so much to say about the material aspects of our lives. It is the proverbial tip of the ice berg; the part that lies beneath the surface is by far the larger part. The Biblical concern for the day to day economics (from the Greek *oikonomia*: the affairs of the household) of our lives is rooted in nothing less than the ultimate questions of life and death – it is a question of salvation.


Salvation is an awkward subject, and more than a little passé. The very idea of salvation – that we have some deep need or some great peril from which we need saving, and that we cannot do it on our own – is an insult to modern, secular culture (unless you are a Wall Street investment banker looking for a trillion-dollar government bail out). Within the church, the subject of salvation represents a dividing line. There are those for whom Christianity has been reduced almost solely to a concern for staying out of hell and getting to heaven – pie in the sky when you die. Then there are those who have rejected all of that superstitious fluff and come to understand the Christian gospel as merely a religious social justice manifesto. Many people do not fit these simplistic caricatures but sit uneasily in a tension between them – is salvation something I am concerned about or not? And then there is the bigger question, not usually asked – what is salvation anyway?

There is no way of getting around it, the Bible is a salvation story. Within its pages, the theme of salvation has enormous breadth: it is applied to immediate circumstances of peril and need, to communal deliverance from oppression, to the ultimate destination of human souls, and even to the cosmic renewal of all creation. This is clearly too big a subject to do justice to here, but it is still worthwhile pointing out some major themes.

Put most simply, salvation in the Bible is a movement from death to life. This certainly involves a message about what happens to us after we die and the affirmation is simple: death is not the end and life should be lived for life's sake, not in the shadow of death. But the question about life *after* death is only part of the picture; the Biblical message is just as concerned about the experience of death *before* death.

All of us know, if we are honest, what it is like to be dying on the inside. Again and again throughout the Bible, God addresses himself to people who are living dead. In the prophetic vision of Ezekiel, the state of his people is represented by a valley of dry bones, to which God commands him to prophesy:

Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath



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to enter you and you shall live. (Ezekiel 37:5)

The apostle Paul uses similarly stark imagery to remind the Ephesians of the state they had come from: ‘As for you, you were dead’ (Eph 2:1).

God’s intention throughout the Bible is for us to move from death to life *now*, to experience true life *now*.

Often Paul talks about salvation in the present continuous tense, that is, as something that is happening now and ongoing: ‘we are being saved’ (eg. 1 Cor 1:18).

Most of us can relate at some level to the imagery of dying or death to describe our states of emotional or spiritual health. However, we often fail to see the connections between our interior lives and our exterior lives. The Bible contends that the way we live, especially in our behaviour around money and the things that it buys, can either be life-giving or it can take life away from us. Jesus warns, ‘what will it profit you to gain the whole world and forfeit your life?’ (Mark 8:36)

In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses takes pains to explain this idea to the Israelites. The people are gathered on the cusp of entering the promised land; they have been liberated from their slavery in Egypt (both a spiritual and economic condition); they have wandered in the wilderness for forty years dependent on a manna economy and

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unlearning the mindset of Egypt (see *Manna Matters* June 09); over that time they have been given a whole new vision of what life could be like, what we have come to call ‘the law’ (see *Manna Matters* November 09). The beauty of the

law is the breadth of its vision, addressing social, economic, political, ecological and religious matters. At the end of Deuteronomy, Moses sums up for the Israelites what it is all

about, what God’s intention is for this new way of living:

If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, then you shall live ...today I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life ... (Deut 30:16-19)

Similarly, the Apostle Paul is continually at pains in his letters to stress that part of the meaning of salvation is moving away from destructive habits of living into a way of life that is truly life-giving:

You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by deceitful desire, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with a new self, created according to the likeness of God ... (Eph 4:22-24).

For Paul this necessarily means developing everyday non-conformity to ‘the patterns of this world’ (Romans 12:1-2).



Illustration by Ben Liney

But, of course, it is in Jesus that all of these themes come together most strongly. In the middle of the Gospel of John, Jesus sums up his whole purpose and meaning with striking clarity and simplicity: 'I came that they might have life, and have it in abundance' (John 10:10). All four gospels positively ring with the call to enter into true life and to abandon the graves of the living dead, culminating with the cross and the empty tomb. Almost everything in the gospels can be read through this lens. Even the idea of *eternal life* in the gospels, properly understood, is one that spills over both sides of the death-divide: eternity doesn't start after you die, it starts now!

Yet throughout the gospels Jesus makes it abundantly clear that the only way to enter into real life is to let go of second-rate life: 'For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it' (Mark 8:35). Jesus also makes it clear that this requires a radical revision of our material lives: he tells cautionary stories about rich fools and wealthy Lazarus; he asks the rich young man to sell all of his possessions; he rejoices in Zacchaeus' salvation when he re-orders his financial life; he says that you cannot serve both God and money; he urges us to stop striving after material things and he observes that where our treasure is, there our heart is also. These teachings are often seen as too hard, and are either spiritualised into irrelevance or ignored altogether. But that is only because we are still ambivalent about the direction in which true life lies. Jesus is realistic about this:

... the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it. (Matt 7:13-14)

Jesus understands, and indeed the whole Bible demonstrates, that the myth of money and its power is one of the core temptations of humanity and one of the core forces that destroys life – both inner-life and outer-life – in the world. In particular, the Biblical story attests that economics is one of the primal powers that drives a wedge between human relationships, between humans and creation, and ultimately between humanity and God.

That is why Jesus' teachings on money are so forcefully concerned to wake us up to the lies that destroy life and destroy love. Because, ultimately, the Biblical call to salvation – what we are *saved to*, both in this life and the next – is the invitation into the communion of love. For love is the only viable habitat for life.

God sent his only son into the world that we might *live* through him. [...] if we love one another, God *lives* in us [...] God is love, and those who *live* in love *live* in God, and God *lives* in them. (1 John 4: 9, 12, 16)

Thus far we can summarise a few things about the idea of salvation in the Bible:

1. the call from death into life is intended for us here and now, and not just after we 'shuffle off this mortal coil';
2. part of what we are *saved from* are the primal human lies about material things – money and stuff - which poison the wellsprings of life and love;
3. part of what we are *saved to* is a whole new world ('a new creation' – 2 Cor 5:17) of priorities and possibilities in relation to the material side of life, one that re-instates material things to a positive and life-giving place in our lives, and in particular, one that supports, rather than detracts from, the communion of love.

But here we need to be careful. The Bible makes clear that our material lives are intimately bound-up with the big questions of life and death, and our experience of them in both this life and the next. But this is not the whole picture. The experience of life, real life, cannot be reduced to our material state of being. This also is a core lie that Jesus himself, quoting Moses, has to reject in confrontation with

Satan: 'Man does not live by bread alone' (Matt 4:4). No matter how much we work on reclaiming health and life-

giving practices and attitudes to our material lives, this can never by itself, lead to life. We need more. We need God.

The necessary precondition to the story of salvation is therefore the story of need. Jesus makes this abundantly clear in the opening line of the Beatitudes – those eight awesome statements that hold the keys to the Kingdom. In this first Beatitude Jesus addresses the fundamental question of who the Kingdom of Heaven is opened up to, who gets to access its treasure of wonders. The answer is simple and profound, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven' (Matt 5:3). Or to put it another way, blessed are those who know their need of God. And here is the nub of the question for us: *are we aware of our need?*

One way of characterising my life story is to see it in terms of repeating cycles: at the beginning are phases in which everything seems to be going well and I forge ahead with life. Somewhere along the line I fall into an attitude that I have everything under control and that I am good at this life thing. But bit by bit things inevitably become harder; relationships fray, some parts of life start to unravel and others become a grind. Left unattended, such states can continue for a very long time; sometimes there is a crash. Either way, the cycle only ends when I somehow come to a recognition that my current state is intolerable – that it is not good, that bit by bit I am dying. Coming to such a place is always painful and always inconvenient (it requires changes), but always life-giving. It is the point of turning.

This last winter has been such a time for me; a time when physical, circumstantial and spiritual factors all combined and conspired to bring me (again) to the end of my self-



sufficiency; to realise that in all sorts of ways, none of them explicit, I had been denying God and denying life. But you can't hold back the river and sooner or later the dams we have constructed to hold back God and life will fail; when

they do, all manner of things are washed away. If only we can let the water do what it needs to do. Thank God for such times. And thank God for spring.

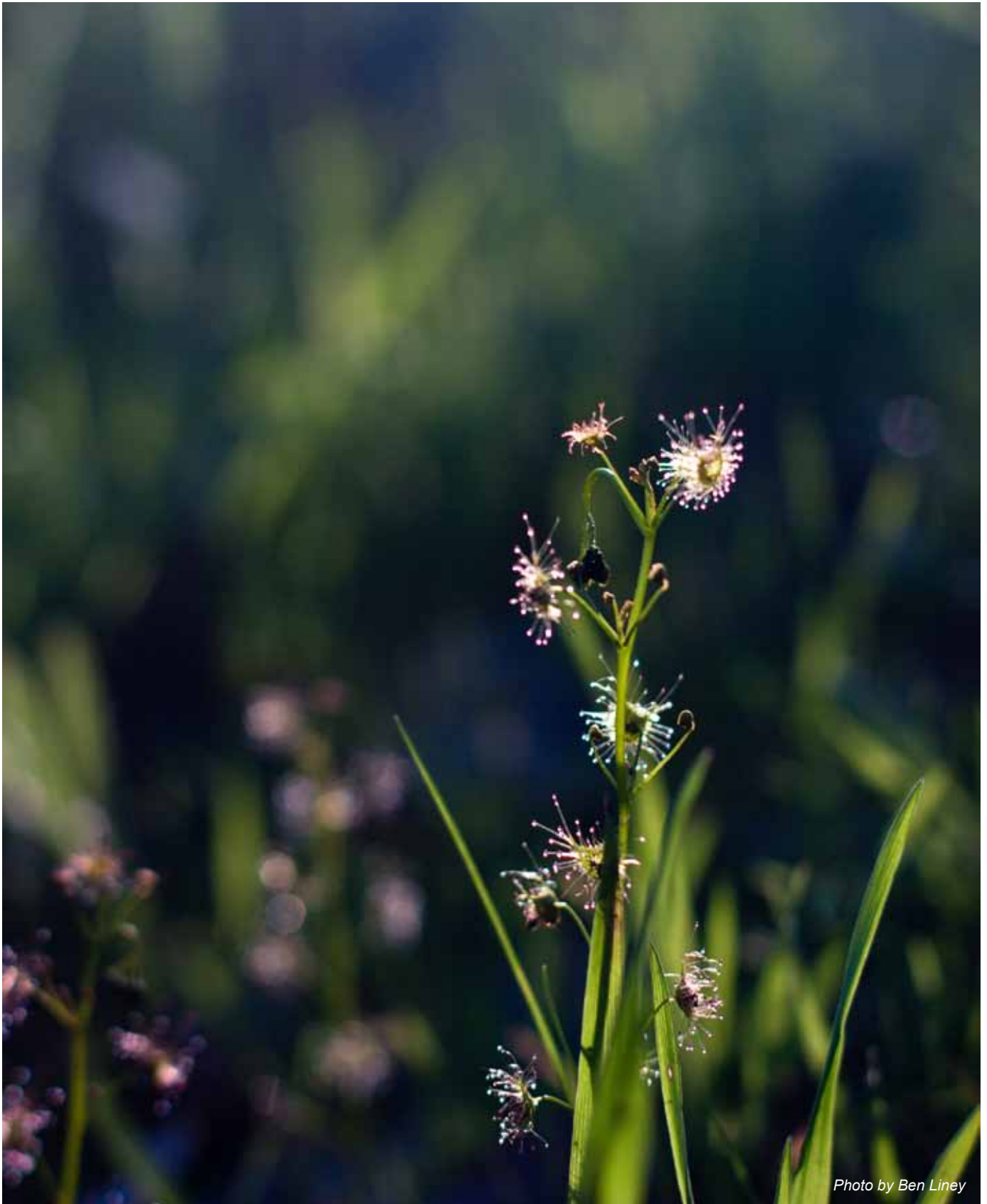


Photo by Ben Liney



In the deep end

Finding new life on pilgrimage in Bangladesh

Greg Hewson

What did you go to the desert to see? John the Baptist asked this question of the Pharisees and Scribes coming out to him in the Jordan Wilderness. What did you come to Bangladesh to see? Why come here? Why travel half way around the world to find yourself? What is God showing you? Sitting on beds, huddled together in a hotel room in the regional town of Elenga, Bangladesh, our own set of 'pilgrimage questions' confront the group midway through our TEAR DEEP trip.

'I want to go home and start a veggie garden', reflected one participant. Others agreed. Struck by the daily connection to land and food that those we had met 'enjoyed', a few on the group reflected upon their own disconnection with food, the earth and what sustains them.

'The Bible never seemed so real for me', shared another of the participants. This echoed my own experience on earlier trips to the sub-continent. Stripped away from the familiar supports and faith-denying mechanisms that surrounds so much of our own culture, the trip brought each of us face to face with the personal side of the 'global poor'. Stories of lepers, beggars, healing and overwhelming human need suddenly had a face!

In January this year I was fortunate enough to lead a bunch of TEAR supporters from around Australia to Bangladesh on a DEEP trip (Development, Education Experience Program). For 15 days we visited the work of two of TEAR Australia's Christian partner agencies, traveling around various parts of central and northern Bangladesh.

This was my second visit to Bangladesh and fourth to the subcontinent in the past 10 years. Yet this time I was in charge of 14 other people! I was really keen not to lose anyone. In fact counting heads on and off buses became a constant refrain during my time there. If I could make sure everyone was safe, everything else I did would be a bonus! And I'm happy to report everyone did make it back to Australia, and mostly in one piece...a few close shaves, search parties, and days in hospitals notwithstanding.

Despite everyone making it back to Australia in one piece, they were not the same people they had been when they left. This is as it should be, because for TEAR and for me personally, the opportunity for immersion in a different culture is all about 'transformation' within a person's life. *'Every act of faith builds more faith'* suggested St Francis of Assisi. To me, these modern day pilgrimages to foreign places are small steps of faith for people wanting to see more clearly.

Within my own faith journey, this occurred via a number of immersion experiences when I was in my late teens and early 20's. Waiters Union course in West End Brisbane, living and working at Urban Seed for two years, then traveling with Elvira (my wife) to New Delhi for three months in 2000, connecting with the work of two groups passionate about seeing transformation occur in the lives of those struggling with drug dependencies.

Within each of these and other 'acts of faith', I have come out the other side a different person. Not in a straightforward, easy to

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describe, linear fashion, but in small, surprising, often confronting ways. Generally with an increased courage and insight to take another faith step. So in leading a bunch of mostly young people to Bangladesh, many of whom had never left Australian shores before, it was like rediscovering that part of my own journey.

The 'mission trip' phenomenon, of which TEAR's DEEP trips are a part, is in a sense a form of Christian pilgrimage for middleclass westerners. Growing up in a world of increasing communication and information, we somehow sense the need to journey to foreign and dangerous places in order to rub off some of our own cultural and religious baggage with the pervasive hope of finding something a bit more authentic. As one of the younger members of our trip so powerfully put it, 'If you let him do it, Jesus will ruin your life...but you'll get so much more'.

It is for that 'much more' ideal that I see so many who we send on TEAR trips longing. Something authentic, meaningful, honest. On a recent trip to Melbourne, one of TEAR Australia's long-term friends and former head of our Indian partner EFICOR, CB Samuel shared at a breakfast on the theme of partnership. CB spoke of the enormous opportunity the church in the 'west' has in connecting with the growing and dynamic church in much of the developing world. 'You have the opportunity to experience the living God'.

The ability of trips, brokered within ongoing Christian partnerships, to create 'new pilgrimage' type experiences is at the heart of what I've been seeing in my work for TEAR for some time now. Yet they are not without their challenges. Not least of which is turning the experience into an ongoing practice, as one of our group members reflected:

I have come to the realisation that there is quite a responsibility.... (pause). The calling is to make sure that it does make a difference, that it does bear fruit, not just for me but for others. The other challenge is to think about what I can sacrifice...(long pause)...very scary.

I'm not for a moment suggesting that traveling overseas into 'developing' communities is the only way we can see more clearly the truth about our culture, the world and ourselves. Far from it. In fact, as the previous quote suggests, the costs of these types of experiences may far out way the benefits.

Yet as I reflect on my own pilgrimages and have the opportunity to journey with others in theirs, I'm repeatedly struck by their 'saving' qualities. For the way God works in and through such journey's, helping people see more of the whole picture. And that I think is worth going to see.



Photo by Greg Hewson



Easy atonement?

A journey into the murky world of carbon offsetting.

Kim Cornford

Earlier in the year, in the midst of the Rudd Government's failure to make any response to climate change, "the moral challenge of our generation", I was reminded that it is often the small choices for positive change that really make a difference to the world around us, and which honour God. It was in this context that I began to look into the idea of carbon offsets. What is it, what is its purpose, and is this something we should be doing?

More than a year ago I had attended a local Carbon Reduction Action Group (CRAG) meeting and was challenged about our household's carbon footprint, and the myriad of ways in which our everyday life and choices impact the planet. It came as no great surprise that out of all the categories assessed, air travel constituted more than half of our household's footprint. Living far from both our families in Queensland, and working in overseas development easily tallies up thousands of air kilometres. Certainly, these issues were known to us, but I discovered that actually doing the calculations on our household emissions across energy, transport, diet and waste, and then seeing the hard data did shed new light. We realised that if our concern to care for God's earth is one which we take seriously, a meaningful response was required of us.

What has this change looked like so far? In the CRAG assessment, the next highest source of our household emissions was from beef and dairy. In our household, what we eat, and the way in which we buy food is changing. Most importantly, we have reduced our meat consumption to 2 or 3 meals per week, are consuming smaller portions in those meals and have mostly replaced beef with kangaroo. We're also much more aware of how much milk and cheese we consume. Did you know that it takes 5 litres of milk to make about 500g of cheddar? Although we have 100% Accredited Greenpower, we keenly assess our electricity usage each quarter, and likewise our Green Gas bill gets scrutinised for efficiency gains. I remind myself daily that getting on my bike instead of grabbing the car keys to do that quick job, or quick trip to the shop, is worth it.

After examining the sources of our carbon and other greenhouse gas emissions, and strategising how we could make reductions, we realised that even on this new path, there are some things we can't change, or are not ready to change just yet. In particular, while we are attempting to reduce our air travel – we recently drove to Brisbane instead of flying - we are unable to eliminate it. The more we have explored the myriad of ways in which we are responsible for emitting carbon, the more we have come to realise that we will always be 'carbon positive'. This got us thinking about the tricky issue of carbon offsets.

A carbon offset is used to compensate for greenhouse gas emissions from your own activities. It is an investment in a project or activity that reduces greenhouse gas emissions or sequesters (stores) carbon from the atmosphere. The investment could be in tree planting or forestry, renewable energy, and so on.

Immediately the first prickly issue arises – will this carbon offset

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assuage the discomfort we feel about our emissions, and lull us into an easy sense of guiltlessness, and therefore allow us to continue our carbon lifestyle? Yes, it most definitely could.

The purchase of carbon offsets can, and does, allow individuals, small businesses and large corporations alike to buy their way out of responsibility and disown the requisite sacrifices required to reduce global warming. It can be done in minutes, online, paid for by credit card.

For example, for a grand total of \$3.42 on my return flight to Brisbane with Virgin Blue I can ease my conscience and supposedly 'fly carbon neutral'. As I research what this might actually mean, I begin to see how the issue gets complex and questionable. When I do the same carbon calculation for air travel with other carbon offset calculators, my offset can cost anywhere between \$15 and \$22. So what exactly am I paying for, or rather, not paying for?

Indeed at the very core of the process of carbon offsetting are some very difficult ethical questions about how our economy operates, what our society values, and our complicity in it all. Carbon trading has facilitated the development of a global carbon market valued at tens of billions of dollars, and ironically, delivered enormous profits to many of the world's big greenhouse gas polluters. In 1997 the Kyoto Protocol established the 'Clean Development Mechanism' offset system whereby industrialised countries purchase emission reduction credits in lieu of cutting their own emissions, and developing countries receive the proceeds to fund clean development projects. Projects might be hydropower dams, biomass power plants, changes to industrial processes, and so on. A report published by the NGO International Rivers shows that offsets are being sold to projects that never needed income from the CDM to be built, and has actually resulted in the 'transfer of billions of dollars to undeserving project developers' and an 'army of carbon brokers and consultants'.¹

¹ McCully, P (2008) *The Great Carbon Offset Swindle*, International Rivers, USA.

Furthermore, as Miriam Pepper noted in a previous edition of *Manna Matters* (Nov 09, p.10), profitable carbon offsets in developing countries can often come at the expense of poor and marginalised local groups, especially ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples. The International Rivers report quotes a statement from the International Indigenous Peoples' Forum:

Any further expansion of the CDM [Clean Development Mechanism] is an excuse to avoid real emissions reductions. The CDM and the carbon market are instruments that commodify the atmosphere, promote privatisation and concentrate resources in the hands of a few, taking

away the rights of many to live with dignity. CDM are not a mechanism for mitigating climate change. It is not just "carbon" or pollution that is being traded, but people's lives."

The International Rivers report unveils the difficulties of monitoring, of legal frameworks, of foreign ownership of local resources, of the inevitable strengthening of global imbalances in wealth and ownership of resources.

In Australia, tree planting projects are the main carbon offset offered by providers. However, there are no requirements for tree planting projects to value biodiversity or other ecosystem services such as water, soil, and salinity. Despite global campaigning in recent years around the disastrous social and environmental impacts of large scale

monoculture tree plantations, Australian policy and incentives still encourage these practices. The Australian Greenhouse Office in its "Guide to Forest Sink Planning, Management and Carbon Accounting" document clearly explains that plantations sequester carbon more quickly than environmental plantings. Under the Kyoto guidelines, revegetation does not meet the 'forest' criteria, and therefore is not counted towards Australia's Kyoto target.

Participation in the business of carbon trading serves to distract attention from the wider systemic changes needed to tackle climate change, continues the exploitation of the global marginalised, and can create a whole new set of



Illustration by Ron Barrett



problems.

So there are some pretty strong reasons to be a bit suspicious of this whole offsetting business. But what about all that carbon that we have come to realise we can't avoid emitting (at least in the near future)? Can we still find some way of offsetting without entering into the dangers described above? Because of our sense of the urgency of climate change, we have felt the need to push this further.

Having become clearer about the dangers, we decided that we would still seek some means of actively promoting the removal of carbon from the atmosphere, roughly equal to our yearly emissions. However, we felt the need to set some strict criteria:

1. To not consider any offsetting without first having undertaken a serious process of carbon accounting and reduction planning. This means finding out how much we are emitting and the contributions that our various household activities make to this, and then getting hard-nosed about how we make changes that reduce our emissions.
2. If we use a carbon offset provider, it must be a not-for-profit organisation, as there are too many perverse incentives for pursuing profit in the carbon market.
3. The carbon offset provider must undertake the activity itself and not be a broker for someone else. This is to avoid the complexity involved in multiple layers, and the extra opportunity it provides for tricky accounting.
4. In seeking an offset, it should be as direct as possible, and not involve abstractions such as imputed 'avoided emissions', and more tricky accounting. This has led us to favour planting trees, the simplest and most direct way of drawing carbon out of the atmosphere.
5. Using trees to offset should not just see them as 'carbon sinks' as this can lead to all sorts of other land use and environmental problems. Rather, funding tree planting as part of an offset should be part of a broader ecological restoration and revegetation program, with benefits in biodiversity, habitat, waterway health and protection against salinity.
6. The project must be undertaken in Australia.

Using a suite of emissions calculators, we estimated that we emitted 18.44 tonnes of greenhouse gases (CO₂ equivalent) in 2009, which could be offset by planting around 70 trees. Ideally, we would love to plant those 70 trees ourselves, on land with which we can have an ongoing connection. We are still working on this, but in the meantime we used the *Carbon Offset Guide* (see box below) to find a few carbon offset providers who meet our criteria, and then selected the one

that seemed best to us.

One of the positives we have found in doing this is that it hurts financially to do it – it cost us around \$600 for our 2009 emissions. This means that we are paying more for our way of life, which is exactly what we need, and we have a more direct incentive to reduce our emissions.

The two positive aspects of thinking through offsets have been putting a price on our personal carbon pollution and linking this to thinking about how we can participate in land restoration in Australia.

However, we are also painfully aware that it still raises many conundrums. If we were to offset this level of emissions for the next fifty years (until I am almost 90), this would require planting about 3,500 trees. That doesn't sound too bad, but if every household in Australia

was to do this for the next fifty years, this would require planting over 35 billion trees, which is neither feasible nor desirable. This just goes to show that carbon offsets are no answer to our climate change challenges, and that what we need is nothing less than a radical overhaul of the carbon structure of our economy.

The two positive aspects of thinking through offsets have been putting a price on our personal carbon pollution and linking this to thinking about how we can participate in land restoration in Australia. Our ultimate goal is to work towards 'DIY offsetting': that is self-imposing a price (ie. the cost of trees) on our carbon pollution and putting that money, along with our time and energy, directly into some land restoration that is not officially linked to any carbon offset system. That way, we would be taking some responsibility for our personal pollution, building a connection with the land and communities of people who live on the land, and no one would be counting or measuring the sequestered carbon as part of any supposed solution to climate change. Watch this space ...

Count your own carbon

Emissions calculators:

www.climatepositive.org
www.carbonneutral.com.au
www.greenfleet.com.au
www.breatheeasy.com.au

Finding out about carbon offset providers:

The *Carbon Offset Guide* developed by EPA Victoria and Global Sustainability at RMIT is a good independent source of information.

www.carbonoffsetguide.com.au

Washed clean

The joys and the justice of making your own soap

Delwyn Riordan

It is a Saturday morning, and while children run around ovals all over the state, kick various shapes of ball and generally get very grubby, a group of friends gather outside a kitchen in Footscray. Mixing caustic soda with water causes fumes to fly and we all retreat inside where the work of weighing, measuring and warming begins. As the oils melt and merge, conversation flows. Soap, children, ethical purchasing, school, gardening - the topics are as varied as the interests of those in the room.

The one subject it continues to return to is the soap.

The recipe is simple - coconut oil, olive oil, lye (caustic soda mixed with water) and a selection of essential oils. The simplicity belies the science of soap making where all oils are not created equal. We have chosen our oils and ratios carefully to give a soap which will be hard enough to last, and will also lather well. We have also chosen oils which work well together and allow us to avoid palm oil.

Palm oil is one of the most commonly used oils in the cosmetic and food industries, and it comes at a huge environmental cost. Most palm oil is produced in Borneo and Sumatra, where rapid clearing of rainforest for palm oil production is destroying the habitat of orangutan's at such a rate that it is predicted they will be extinct in 20 years, with Sumatran tigers also being placed under extreme pressure. In Indonesia and Malaysia it is estimated that rainforests are being cleared at the rate of 300 football fields per minute, predominantly for the production of palm oil. According to the World Wildlife Fund, there are alternative sites where palm oil could be produced, with at least 300 - 700 million hectares of abandoned land globally that could potentially be used for palm oil production.

What is palm oil, and why is it so popular? Palm oil is an edible oil produced agriculturally from the fruit of the oil palm tree. There are two varieties of this tree, one originating in West Africa and the other in Central and South America. Two distinct types of oil are extracted from the fruit of the tree, with edible palm oil coming from the pulp of the fruit, and palm kernel oil coming from the seed of the fruit and being used in the manufacture of cosmetics. The palm oil tree is extremely productive, yielding 10 times the rate per hectare of other vegetable oils, such as soybean oil and it is also an extremely versatile oil. As many

as 50% of the packaged food products on our supermarket shelves contain palm oil, though we find very few mentions of it on ingredient lists.

One of the great difficulties we face in attempting to avoid palm oil in our foods, soaps and cosmetics is the lack of transparency in the labeling of palm oil in the products we buy every day. Did you know that the descriptor "vegetable oil" could mean

palm oil? As consumers we are placed in the position of actively supporting the unsustainable production of palm oil through our every day shopping without even knowing that we are doing so! If we were shopping in the USA, we would read "palm oil" on the label and know exactly what we were purchasing, but laws around food labeling in Australia do not require this level of detail.

Back in Footscray, I'm enjoying melting coconut oil - our coconut oil has come from small communities in the Pacific, where local people grow and harvest the coconuts and then extract the rich, high quality cold pressed oil within hours of the nut leaving the tree. This crop neither enslaves the grower, nor destroys important habitat in the developing world. It also smells great as it melts. I picture the small, open shed in Tonga where I watched, eight years ago, as women and men worked together to extract this oil. First, removing the thick husk from the coconut, then breaking it open and scraping out the fresh, white flesh from inside the nut. The shredded coconut then warms gently on a heated

Palm oil is one of the most commonly used oils in the cosmetic and food industries, and it comes at a huge environmental cost.



Glenn Daniels and Delwyn mix the lye (caustic soda and water).

plate until it reaches just the right temperature and dryness when it is packed into the press and a woman pulls down on the handle until the clear, fresh oil flows into the bucket waiting below, the whole process taking less than an hour. I remember people working together, communities growing stronger as they add value to this crop which in the past was exported as copra, the dried coconut meat, and value added in other, richer, countries. I remember the astute business women and men in Samoa and Tonga who work hard to achieve greater independence for their people.

I also remember other soap making days! Where friends have worked together to produce something we need, and can use. Where in a small way we have loosened our dependence on the great machine of industrial production. When we take back our independence we liberate ourselves from those who would tie us to eternal consumption; of products, of coal based energy, of the skills of others. Soap making is not hard! It requires some care, some thought and a few tools but it is well within the reach of most.

Something is created when we work together, something which reaches beyond the product of our labour. I am reminded of a novel I've been reading. Set during World War II, a family has had news of a son missing in action. The local priest visits to offer comfort but there is something missing between them, they don't connect in any real way and he leaves feeling that he has not offered something to them, but they to him. A friend of the family later reflects that the priest has no claim to speak of a son to this family because "He never done a day's work with us in his life, nor could have. He never did stand up in his ache and sweat and go down the row with us..". While we aren't sweating over the work of soap making, and our livelihoods don't depend on it, we are creating much more than soap. Our common goal connects us with each other, our conversation changes our thoughts spill out, we learn to know each other and ourselves in a different way.

The other thing I love about soap making is the pleasure of using something that I have made, something that I understand. I think we use things differently when we know them well, when something has been made through our own effort we not only appreciate it, but we cease to take it for granted. Soap is no longer just another item I pick off the supermarket shelf, it is something I think about every so often and work for a few times a year. If we run out of our own soap I *feel* that. I would love to extend this thought and care to some of the other things I use regularly, when I think about the things I use in a day there are many that I use quite thoughtlessly; that I couldn't make and don't understand. It seems to me that this disconnection is at the heart of some of the more pressing environmental and social issues of our time.

Now that my children are home, and covered in mud I'm pleased to have my cold processed vegetable oil soap, free of palm oil and rich in stories to clean their grubby bodies... thank you friends.



Janet Ray pours the soap into moulds.

Oils ain't oils ...

Find out more about palm oil

Palm Oil Action Group

www.palmoilaction.org.au

Melbourne Zoo 'Don't Palm Us Off' campaign

The Zoo website has a link to a pdf "Palm oil ingredient card" which lists the ways palm oil is most commonly described on ingredient lists.

www.zoo.org.au/PalmOil

World Wildlife Fund

www.wwf.org.au/ourwork/land/land-clearing-and-palm-oil

'Truth in Labelling'

Nick Xenophon, the independent Senator for South Australia has introduced a bill to parliament calling for "Truth in Labelling" visit this website to find out more and add your name to the online petition.

www.truthinlabelling.com.au/index.html

Coconut Oil

We source our coconut oil from Kokonut Pacific; their website tells more of the coconut oil story.

www.kokonutpacific.com.au

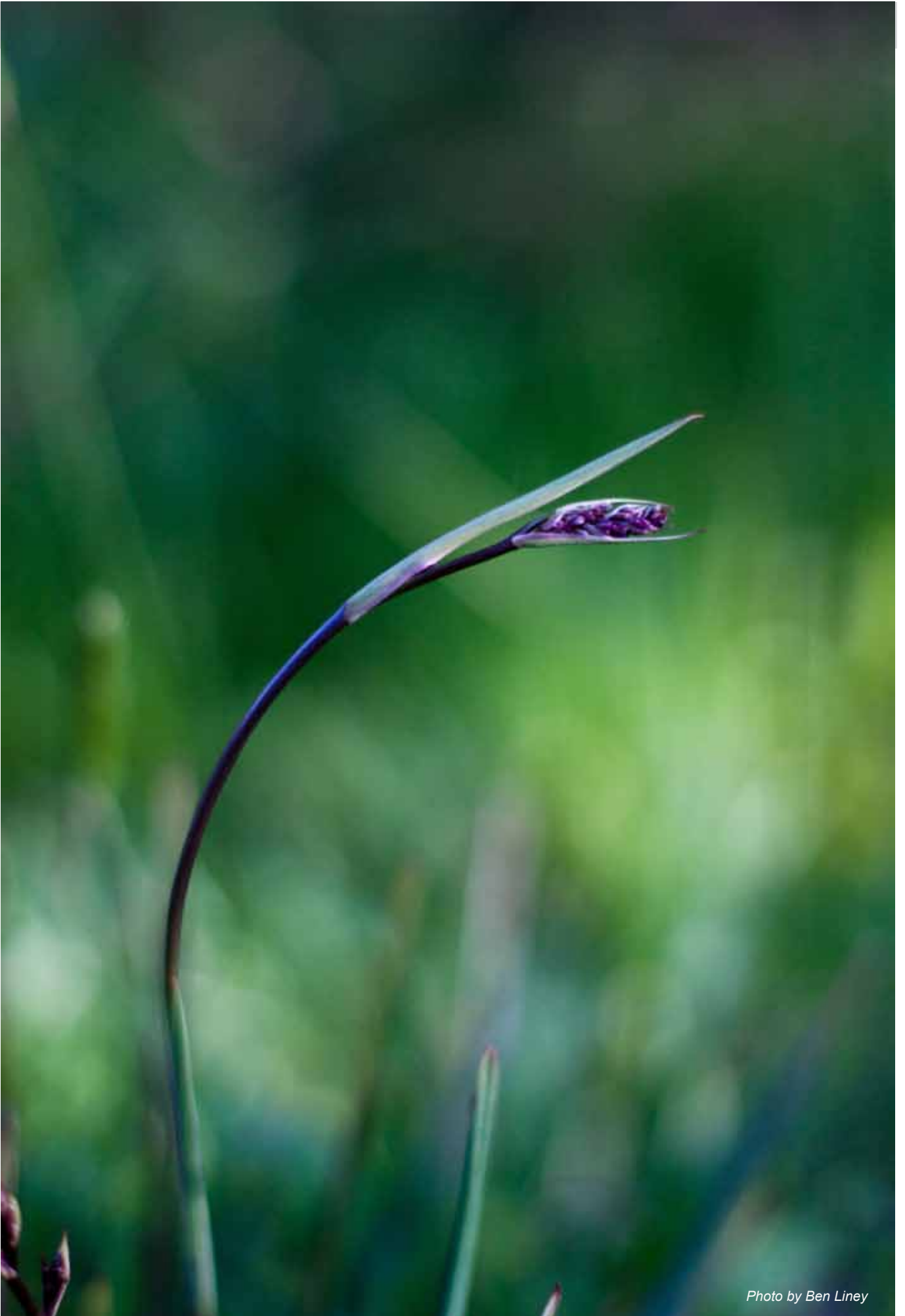


Photo by Ben Liney



How to make your own soap

Here is what you need to make soap and a rough idea of how you do it. However, it is quite an involved process and doing it safely is important. A full set of directions is available on the Manna Gum website:

www.mannagum.org.au/manna_matters/november-2010/home_economics

Ingredients:

- Sodium Hydroxide (NaOH) (available in supermarkets, next to Draino - don't get Draino, it's only 50% NaOH)
- Water
- Olive Oil
- Coconut Oil
- Essential Oils (we regularly use eucalyptus and lavender)
- Other special bits (eg oatmeal, lavender flowers)

Equipment:

- Rubber gloves
- Safety glasses
- Scales
- Rubber spatula *
- Large glass bowl
- 2 x large saucepan pots *
- Wooden spoons *
- Food Thermometer
- Old electric handheld blender *

Soap moulds or milk cartons or flat rectangular containers
 Old blanket
 * recommend that these items be dedicated to soapmaking only.

Basic Method:

Add Sodium Hydroxide to water to make lye. This is a volatile reaction and should be done somewhere very safe.
 Gently warm up the oils to 27c, and when the lye has cooled to 27c (1-2 hours) it is ready to mix with the oils. Stir briskly (or whiz) until a small amount of soap drizzled across the surface leaves a trace pattern. Add any essential oils and special bits. Mix well. Pour soap into moulds. Cover well with blanket. Leave for 2-3 days.
 Cut soap into individual pieces (if using cartons or large containers).
 Leave soap for 6 weeks to safely complete saponification.

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* We can send you information on how to set up an EFT.

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About Manna Gum

Manna Gum is an independent non-profit organisation that seeks to:

- Provide resources for Christian groups to understand and practise the social, economic and political implications of the Gospel of Christ; and*
- Stimulate critical thinking on issues of aid and development, poverty and wealth, and to undertake research and advocacy on matters concerning Australian aid and development involvement overseas.*

Please contact us if you would like more information about our work or to find how we could support you and your group/organisation to explore some of these issues.

www.mannagum.org.au

Post to MANNA GUM, 14 Essex Street, Footscray VIC 3011, call 0468 967 131 or email us at jonathan@mannagum.org.au