



## Buddhism and organ donation

There are no injunctions in Buddhism for or against organ donation. The death process of an individual is viewed as a very important time that should be treated with the greatest care and respect. In some traditions, the moment of death is defined according to criteria which differ from those of modern Western medicine, and there are differing views as to the acceptability of organ transplantation. The needs and wishes of the dying person must not be compromised by the wish to save a life. Each decision will depend on individual circumstances.

Central to Buddhism is a wish to relieve suffering and there may be circumstances where organ donation may be seen as an act of generosity. Where it is truly the wish of the dying person, it would be seen in that light.

If there is doubt as to the teachings within the particular tradition to which a person belongs, expert guidance should be sought from a senior teacher within the tradition concerned.

When he discovered a monk sick and uncared for, the Buddha said to the other monks:

"Whoever would care for me, let him care for those who are sick".

(Mahavagga VIII.26.1-8 Kucchivikara-vatthu: The Monk with Dysentery. Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu)

There are many different Buddhist traditions and organ donation is an individual choice, but:

"Giving is the greatest of Buddhist virtues. The Buddha in a previous life gave his body to a starving tigress who could not feed her cubs. There are many such Jataka tales some in which he even gave his eyes to someone who wanted them.

"What loss do I suffer to give an unwanted organ after my death to give another person life?"

(Dr Desmond Biddulph, Chairman of The Buddhist Society)

"I would be happy if I was able to help someone else live after my own death."

(Dhammarati, Western Buddhist Order)

"Non-attachment to the body can be seen in the context of non-attachment to self and Buddhist teachings on impermanence. Compassion is a pre-eminent quality. Giving one's body for the good of others is seen as a virtue." (The Amida Trust)

"Organ donation is acceptable in Theravada Buddhism. It is a Buddhist virtue to generously extend help to other sentient beings and this covers the case of organ donation." (Phramaha Laow Panyasiri, Abbot, The Buddhavihara Temple)