



# **Buddhism and Organ Donation**

A guide to organ donation  
and Buddhist beliefs





## **Organ donation**

Organ donation is the gift of an organ to help someone else who needs a transplant. Hundreds of people's lives are saved each year by organ transplants. Organs that can be donated by people who have died include the heart, lungs, kidneys, liver, pancreas and small bowel. Tissue such as skin, bone, heart valves and corneas can also be used to help others.

## **When can organ donation take place?**

Doctors and nurses are committed to doing everything possible to save life. Organs are only removed for transplantation once all attempts to save life have failed and after death has been certified by a doctor or doctors who are entirely independent of the transplant team.

Most donated organs come from people who die from a severe brain injury and who receive treatment on a ventilator in an intensive care unit. The brain injury damages vital centres in the brain stem which are essential to maintain life. No one can live once these centres have been destroyed. Tests can show conclusively when this has happened.

In some circumstances, patients who die in hospital but are not on a ventilator may also donate. They are called non-heartbeating donors.

Sometimes people who do not die in hospital can become tissue donors.

## **Consent**

The consent, or lack of objection, of those closest to the patient is always sought before organs can be donated. This is why it is so important for people to discuss their wishes with their loved ones. Donation is an individual choice and views differ even within the same religious groups. Many families who agree to organ donation have said that it helps to know some good has come from their loss.

## **Care and respect**

The removal of organs is carried out with the greatest care and respect. The family can see the body afterwards and staff can contact a chaplain or local religious leader if the family wishes.

# 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".*

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

*"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



*"I always carry my donor card with me"*  
Paul Seto, Director, The Buddhist Society

## Organ donation the gift of life

Today more than 10,000 people in the UK need an organ transplant which could save or dramatically improve their lives. Most are waiting for a kidney, others for a heart, lung or liver transplant.

Please join the NHS Organ Donor Register and tell family and friends about your wishes.

Join the NHS Organ Donor Register Online at:

**[www.organdonation.nhs.uk](http://www.organdonation.nhs.uk)**  
**by phoning 0300 123 23 23**  
**or text SAVE to 84118**

## Transplants save lives

Information on Buddhism is available from  
[www.bbc.co.uk/religion](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion)

