

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, Kucchivikaravattu: 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



### How do I become a donor?

If you decide you would like to become a donor on your death, you need to join the NHS Organ Donor Register to ensure your wishes are recorded. Discuss your decision with those closest to you so that they are aware of your wishes. Adding your name to the register is simple and quick:

You can register online at [organdonation.nhs.uk](http://organdonation.nhs.uk)

Or call **0300 123 23 23**

To find out more about organ and tissue donation, visit [organdonation.nhs.uk](http://organdonation.nhs.uk)

# Organ donation and religious beliefs



**A guide to organ donation and Buddhist beliefs**

# Buddhism and organ donation

## 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 or improved 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.

Donation is an individual choice and views differ even within the same religious groups.

## Why is it important to think about donating organs?

With medical advances it is now possible to use transplanted organs and tissues to enhance the life chances of those suffering from a range of terminal conditions such as renal, liver and heart failure. More people than before now suffer from these conditions and some ethnic groups seem to be more affected than others.

The person in need of an organ today may be a stranger, but tomorrow that person could be someone you know and love dearly. So please take the time to think about becoming an organ donor and discuss your thoughts with loved ones.

## Consent

The consent or permission of those closest to the potential donor is always sought before organs can be donated. This is why it is so important to discuss your wishes with your loved ones should you decide to become a donor. Many families who agree to organ donation have said that it helps to know some good has come from their loss.

## When can organ donation take place?

Doctors and their colleagues 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 doctors who are entirely independent of the transplant team.

Most donated organs in the UK come from people who die from a severe brain injury, and who are on a ventilator in an Intensive Care Unit. The brain injury will have damaged the vital centres in the brain stem which are essential to maintain life. Doctors call this 'brain stem death'. This is not the same as being in a coma or 'persistent vegetative state'. Tests are carried out to strict guidelines to show conclusively when this has happened. When brain stem death is pronounced the patient may still be on a ventilator, and have a heart beat which continues to circulate blood around the body. This prevents the organs from losing the oxygen-rich blood supply which is necessary for a healthier transplanted outcome.

Organs can also be donated from people whose death has been certified because their heart has stopped. Certification in these 'non-heart beating' donors is also by doctors who are entirely independent of the transplant team.

## Care and respect

The removal of organs and tissues 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.

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