
Buddhism and Organ Donation

By Gwendaëlle Kock

Few months ago I incidentally found a medical website, listing the position of each religion in relation to organ donation, declaring that Buddhists were against it.

I was appalled, of course. Roland confirmed during a mondo in Maredsous that donation and non body attachment are at the heart of the teaching of Buddha, and that we, practitioners of Zen, were 200% in favour of organ donation (providing that all conditions are respected).

Such opposition against organ donation happens to be the position of Tibetan Buddhists for, according to them, the death process being not completed, extracting organs would equate to kill a person close to death.

This crime however would be lessened on the karmic level since it is a donation, and also because there was first the consent of the donor. Nevertheless for the “advanced” practitioners, there could be a chance of regressing in their future reincarnation.

Those beliefs, indeed very respectful, however are not those of all Buddhists. So I made some research (non exhaustive) on Internet to find out how was presented the Buddhist position (from all schools) on organ donation, and especially whether it was assimilated to the Tibetan’s position.

Globally, **Buddhist sites** raise the notion of a personal choice and highlight the differences among the traditions. Most of them put forward organ donation as an essential Buddhist practice.

The UBF site (Buddhist Union of France) supported the public awareness and information campaign on organ donation by broadcasting a programme on the topic on *France 2 Voix Bouddhistes* (23 June 2002).

There was an earlier TV programme on Bio-ethics (Medicine vs Human Rights : abortion, euthanasia and organ donation, 26 January 1997).

Buddhachannel supported (2010) information campaigns from the Organ Donation Official Structures (ADOT) and put on line the article from the Nice dojo, an account of two workshops given by Roland (not to miss!) : *Birth, illness, life ending and death* : Buddhism perspective.

The site of the Collectif (or group) of Organ donation, seems to differentiate the various traditions, but covers mostly the ones against it (Shintoism, Tibetans). **The France ADOT site** (Federation of the associations for organ and human tissues donation), the main federation, remains very vague on Buddhism. It says that one of the large Buddhist families is in favour but it doesn’t specify which one. The site of the **French Establishment of Transplants** mentions the positions of different religions but is oblivious of Buddhism.

It turns out that is it mainly **unspecialized sites** in Buddhism or organ donation, that present the Tibetan position as the position of Buddhism on the subject : funeral companies, an hospital report on accompanying the dying... (Wikipedia omits to mention the position of Buddhism).

Fortunately there are not too many of those sites popping out when we make the query "Buddhism and organ donation" on Internet. Yet I think it reveals the public approach : facing such lack of information, it'd rather contemplate the Tibetan tradition that has a bigger coverage in the media. We need to highlight that besides the fact that our Tibetan friends do communicate well, they are also very active in all that which is related to death, especially accompanying the dying.

Therefore it is up to us, Zen practitioners, to position ourselves clearly on organ donation, as well as on all the sensitive issues like abortion, gay marriage, euthanasia, cloning, animal treatment in the labs, slaughter houses, without excepting ecology, education as well as the growth of islamophobia, etc. We have to take a stand on those issues and - most especially - communicate !

On this subject, for the French people of our Sangha, the **UBF** will organize **from November on, "LES ASSISES DU BOUDDHISME DE FRANCE"** to address the great religious, ethical and social issues. As an AZI member (if your dojo is not already under UBF), you can attend them. However Olivier Wang Genh (Vice-President of UBF) wants that the people from our Sangha who are planning to participate, come upon approval of Roland, because there are going to be working days, and turning up as a "tourist" wouldn't be convenient.

Gwendaëlle Kock (dojo de Saint Denis de la Réunion)

www.bouddhisme-france.org/ Federation of the Buddhist Associations in France

www.buddhachannel.tv : website of Buddhism in the world

<http://assoc.wanadoo.fr/france-adot/sommaire.html> **Federation of the Organ Donation and Human Tissues Associations**

<http://www.efg.sante.fr/> **French Establishment of Transplants**

ethictransplantation.blogspot.com/ Interview of Dagpo Rimpotche on the question of Organ Donation. 8 April 2011 – Death Fair, Salon de la Mort.

www.groupe-roc-eclerc.com (Funeral site). Funeral rites of the different the religions.

Pictures : The famous "Jakata and the tigress" (Dunhuang fresco) where the bodhisattva throws himself from the top of a cliff to offer his dismembered body to a starving tigress about to devour her newly born baby tigers.