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Buddhist respect for life and Organ Transplants issue

My paper is nor any scientific analysis of any experimental data neither is based on somebody's else results or thoughts. It is a reflection, I have reached by experiencing my life as a medical doctor, a neuroscience researcher, my life as a member of Western society, and finally my life as a Jodo Shinshu priest working for the very Japanese temple in Yokohama, Japan. It was my life that has made my interest in medical and Buddhist ethics and my present paper belongs to such category.

Though most of us prefer not to think about death, it is the only event, which will happen to all of us. Death is the only thing from which all human beings may be sure they can't escape. Death is also somehow scary. We, Buddhists, are taught that actually we don't die for real. Only our bodies pass away. Even if we believe in that, we still are not very comfortable about our own death, since we don't remember any similar experience. At least, MOST of us don't remember! I am someone who survived death in this actual lifetime and that experience has strongly determined the way I live.

When I was 20 years old and a student of Medical University of Warsaw, I was seriously injured in a car accident. As a direct consequence of that misfortune I found myself separated from my body. I saw myself from a distance; a young woman, in pain and lying down on the street. I was dying. In that moment, that body wasn't me, I was somewhere up there, looking down. I saw people calling for an ambulance. I saw a soldier picking up my purse. He opened it. I was wondering why. Immediately my invisible eyes worked like a zoom. I was quite near him, I could see what he was doing. He was looking for my ID to call my family. I saw my head bleeding and my leg broken. But what was most fascinating was that suddenly "I" was NOT my body. I felt that my human flesh was like some sort of convenient vehicle, which can be thrown away once broken. I had no body, so I was able to move with the speed of my thoughts. I had no ears, but I heard what all the

people were saying and even thinking. I had no eyes, but my vision had some kind of rapid zoom ability. I could even see through physical masses such as walls. And I felt incredibly free. In one brief moment it came to my mind that I must have gone through such experiences many times before. When the ambulance came, some sort of force placed me back into my body and I lost my consciousness for three months.

I was incredibly lucky. It was 1962 and at that time there were no organ transplants at all. All people were given equal access to available medical care. At that time our medical establishment believed that the brain was the last organ to cease to function. Therefore a person could only officially be declared dead, when all organs had completely stopped working. Additionally, according to our old laws, we were prohibited from burying anybody earlier than three days after expiration. There were some rare cases of catalepsy, which had confounded medical experts. Some herbal poisons may also work to make somebody appear as if dead.

I have to admit I was very fortunate. The doctors did their best to keep me alive while in a coma, instead of using my body as a free-for-all organ bank. I am even more fortunate, because I am still able to remember how I felt without my body. I believe, all people have the same experience while dying, but most lose their memories, when they return to life. The experience of being apart from my physical form moved me to become a researcher, a medical specialist in brain and nerve tissue, a neuropathologist - an expert in interpretation of dead tissue of brain. Besides my profession I also did some individual studies, giving special attention to the history of Europe and the history of my mother country as well as to philosophy and theoretical physics.

The most attractive part of becoming a physician, at least for myself, was the medical ethics stretching back to the famous Greek Hippocrates. Everybody sworn as a medical doctor should treat equally all people and should give the best possible medical care indiscriminately - to all patients equally, no matter any special circumstances. The ethics also obligated us to treat our colleges- doctors and their families for free.

I was proud of the Hippocrates' ethics. It has worked long time. Even during such apocalyptic times like World War II, most doctors and nurses were saving lives even of their enemies with great risk for themselves. The Hippocrates' ethics has brought the red cross of the Templars as a sign of unarmed medical care and nobody could be proud, if abuses the sign.

I wanted to be a part of equal approach to all people, so the doctor's way looked good to me.

By performing all prescribed duties throughout my medical entire career I was, however, searching for the meaning of human life, particularly of my own life.

"Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?"

In one form or another, the issue of the ultimate beginning has engaged philosophers and theologians in nearly every culture. We can trace our lineage back through the generations, back through our animal ancestors, to early forms of life and protolife, to the elements synthesized in the primordial universe, to the amorphous energy deposited in space before that...However, the question is: what was the real beginning, if there was any beginning?

Aristotle invoked the principle that nothing comes out of nothing. If the universe could never have gone from nothingness to somethingness, it must always have existed. Time must stretch eternally into the past and future.

People have long debated whether time is eternal or finite, whether the universe has always existed or whether it had its definite beginning. Einstein's general theory of relativity implies finiteness. We witness the Universe expanding now from the moment of the big bang. By the Einstein theory, we cannot study anything even near the big bang.

However, the quantum theory of gravity comes into play near the birth of a new universe. String theory introduces a minimal quantum of length as a new fundamental constant of nature (so-called quantum strings). String theory says that there is not any infinite density of the black hole. The bang took place, but the universe predated it. Time

didn't have a beginning and will not have an end. Our universe has begun almost empty and built up to the bang and it has been going through a cycle of death and rebirth. The pre-bang epoch has shaped the present cosmos. The bang is not the ultimate origin of the universe but a transition.

The universe has existed forever. When we accept the existence of 10 spatial dimensions plus time as the 11th one, there is no constant mass anymore. Matter, in its primal constants, is visible like fields, rather like electromagnetic fields, that can adjust their values dynamically.

Strings abhor infinity. They cannot collapse to an infinitesimal point. They condition the eternal character of the universe both in the future and the past.

As all is energy and all is eternal, what am I living for? What makes me live?

What is the true difference between being recognized as living and as dead?"

These questions were kept in a special corner of my mind. I felt there had to be something like a forgotten city, somewhere or something I couldn't recall. It was a sort of an unclear feeling that I did something wrong. Something was not properly placed in my life. Something was missing. But I didn't really know what it was. One day, a bright idea came to my mind: there must be an explanation. There must be some power to help me to overcome my limitations. And I simply called this "power" - without a name, without any particular idea. I was seeking wisdom. So I called Wisdom - in no special form or thought - and... the Wisdom appeared to me. I was given a touch of the Cosmic Dimension.

At that moment, I have realized the String Theory of Physics in a just natural way - as the Reality. I have realized that Cosmos has existed in 10 dimensions plus time. There was no any solid matter in a way our senses were able to detect. Everything was just Energy. We have built a three-dimensional picture of the world based on our ability of catching waves and we got only a fraction of the Reality. We have been three dimensional, so it has been our vision of Life. Three dimensions and Time - that has been all we had learned by our senses.

Nowadays, our children are fascinated by Star Trek stories based very accurately on the newest discoveries of the physics.

It is our choice how we want to live, what we decide to take as the reality and to what degree. It is our choice what we decide to value as the truth worth to follow. It is our choice to recognize the universal value of the Law of Cause and Effect.

If we decide to learn and to experience, we would discover that our own daily human journey contains aspects of origin, identity and destiny and that these personal concerns connect directly to cosmic ones.

“Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?”

2500 years ago, one man called later as the Enlightened One or the Perfect One, or the Buddha taught that there was no any ultimate beginning of everything. He taught that life was ever pulsing energy, which changed forms to manifest itself according to conditions. All conditions were impermanent and anything with a beginning must have an end. It considered, in the same way, the entire universe and every individual.

His teaching was written in an old language with symbols and parallels clear for people of the past. In spite of archaic rhetoric, the message was clear: there was no any ultimate Beginning. Following the Teaching of the Buddha, we can realize that the cycle of birth and death embraces galaxies in the same way as all sentient beings, plants or stones. All goes according to the Law of Cause and Effect. We all are basically energy, infinite energy... Each one of us is like a current of an ocean. We have our characteristics, like every current has got, but we still are the part of the Ocean of Life. There is no any current without water of an ocean. There are no us without entire Life of infinite cosmos.

Today we are more willing to notice that every human being brings to this world an unique karmic potential coded in genes, but one is also being continuously formed by the culture and society.

Sakyamuni, however, was born among very discriminating people with rigid understanding of karma. Nevertheless, He successfully taught them the truly universal

religion of non-substantiality, of impermanence, of the cause of human suffering and of the way of reaching the happiness. He taught that by overcoming the barriers of self one attains the vision of wider spiritual world, wherein all beings are at one in cosmic harmony.

He also taught that in its invisible form the ideal aspect of Sangha is the whole universe transformed into a spiritual community of Buddhas and Buddhas-to-be in terms of time covering past, present, and future, and in space extending to all directions (see Amidakyo). As the gist of Buddhism consists in the faith in fulfillment of triple ideal of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, it must be accomplished not only in theories, but also in actual life.

The Buddhist truth embraced the whole physical world and the whole of human life into one fundamental conception of universal equality. With such sense of equality Buddhism contradicted not only Hindu, but all other religions of that time. Confucian antagonism to Buddhism was ultimately directed against the Buddhist idea of equality. Similarly, every hierarchic society must have problem with Buddhadharma as concerns the social ethics.

The very idea of organ transplants as a method of medical treatment contradicts the fundamental Buddhist concept of universal equality. We have to terminate one person's life prematurely to save some other life. The selection is based on a very vague criterion like electromagnetic signals detected by a machine. There is no any even most sophisticated computer, which can match the complexity of human brain. Entire human body is a very complicated universe, which we know in a fraction, only. Even knowing something, we have still been finding ourselves in a process of correction and surprising changes. And rapidly, we have decided to develop the criterion of "brain death" based on a reading by a very primitive machine - the machine built and scaled by so imperfect beings as we are! We have decided to recognize somebody's death against the Hippocrates' ethics and by denying the best and entire available medical care to one person for giving some more days or months to another patient.

Who are we to make such decisions?

During my 27 years long medical career, the medical establishment has changed their opinions into the quite opposite ones about at least four fundamental questions of diagnosis as well as the treatment. My old professors used to teach that people were not machines and doctors knowledge had always been limited. There have always been some cases of unexpected recoveries from even advanced fatal diseases as well as tragic unexpected deaths caused by minor causes. How arrogant and how greedy have we become to kill people for organs and to make the entire industry of organ - harvests!

“Money moves this world around”.

For Shinran, even the most enlightened person was not absolutely pure, since he/she had to support the body by eating life taken from plants and animals. He/she had to breathe, digest and urinate, which mortifies numerous germs and viruses inhabiting the human body and treating it as their universe.

Shinran wrote: “In Nembutsu non-discrimination is the essence, because it is above praise, inexplicable, and inconceivable...” (Tannisho, ch.10)

The true shinjin, for Shinran, is not just belief. It is a personal experience of Amida’s work, of absolutely non-discriminating Tariki. From this experience, the entire understanding, that of life and that of scriptures, is born. From this experience of Tariki, Nembutsu starts to circulate in our minds like an absolutely essential support of our functioning.

Life is a dynamic activity of Energy. Everything happens according to the Law of Cause and Effect. Some results take a very long time to ripe, but there is no escape from the Law. It concerns universe in the same way as all sentient beings.

If it comes to planets or stones, it is called usually the Law of Nature. When it concerns energy of mind, it is usually called the Law of Karma or the Law of Cause and Effect.

The reason is that energy, which gained consciousness and makes decisions, impulsive or rationalized, can influence significantly what kind of results would come out of its actions. That kind of energy with decisive consciousness is called mind.

I do wonder how human mind could come to such an idea like organ transplants. There is no need to prolong anybody's life in such a way. We kill enough by eating, drinking and breathing. Mind is eternal like the Universe. What we want our bodies to live longer and longer for, at any cost? Is it because we have lost completely any sense of spirituality and any respect for Life?

“ In this world like a burning house, only Nembutsu is true and real” (Shinran, Tannisho)