

THE SUPREME SANGHA COUNCIL OF BANGLADESH

AIDS has a dimension to it that makes it in many ways the “illness of all illnesses”. More than any other pathology, it is thus a synthesis of all the existential characteristics of disease. For all that, from the Buddhist point of view it does not represent anything more than just one of the basic facts of the suffering of existence: the AIDS tragedy is, when it comes down to it, simply the tragedy of existence itself, even if the latter is expressed through it in particularly acute manner. The catastrophe of the past decade thus constitutes from the Buddhist perspective a signal subject of reflection on the impermanence and suffering which are inherent to the universal condition of all living beings.

Given that, Buddhism is a practical spiritual way, essentially concerned about the fate of the human being. **More than the pathology itself, it is the people, those who carry the virus and those who are ill, whom the Buddhist will focus his attention upon.** He will consider them all in the same spirit of love and compassion, and notable from the viewpoint of the ideal of the bodhisattva (1).

The Buddha himself, with this community, ministered to the sick to bring them spiritual assistance (2). He also made it **the duty of both the secular and ordained members of the community to help those who are ill or dying** (3). The aim of these visits is to put the patient in the best possible frame of mind to allow him to face illness, death and his next existence with serenity. For if our present situation is a consequence of previous *karma*, our future equally depends on the *karma* that we are presently building. Therein lies the great hope that Buddhism offers, the very opposite of fatalism. In this respect, the Buddha is not simply compared to a doctor; through his teachings, he is considered to be *the* doctor of universal suffering (4).

Patients who are already practicing Buddhists are encouraged to develop their faith, particularly that in the Three Jewels, that is the Buddha, his teachings, and his community. They are also lead to realise in all lucidity that whatever the illness, their condition is inherent in the very nature of existence. Finally, they are encouraged to turn their mind away from attachment to this world and to direct it towards better planes of existence and towards liberation from the very cycle of births and deaths itself. Those who do not follow Buddhism can none the less find real comfort in it while still respecting their original convictions. The teaching of the Buddha on existential suffering, its karmic causes and the possibility of deliverance from this have a universal import and can be appreciated by all, while leaving one free afterwards to follow along the path of Buddhism or not.

The Sangha Metta Project of Chiang Mai, Thailand has been doing very good work over the ten years of its existence and this manual of treatment is one of its good results. Helping others wherever you can according to their needs is the true expression of compassion, as well as being a great source of encouragement for both people with AIDS and other cares.

I offer my best appreciation and encouragement to everyone who are involved with the Sangha Metta Project and also pray to THE TRIPLE GEM that your good work will be continue to be a source of wide-spread relief and inspiration to people suffering from AIDS and those caring for them.

(REV. DHARMASEN MAHATHERO)

Sangharaj & The Supreme Patriarch Of Bangladesh.