



GERATRICE AND BUDDHISM

メタデータ	言語: jpn 出版者: 公開日: 2010-03-11 キーワード (Ja): キーワード (En): 作成者: Nagura, Michitake メールアドレス: 所属:
URL	https://doi.org/10.24729/00003578

GERIATRICS AND BUDDHISM

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Geriatrics Recommends Humanization of Medicine

The modern medicine which developed as a medicine for illnesses will be required to be reconstructed as a human medicine. This need is especially strongly felt from the standpoint of geriatrics since total medical care is indispensable in the case of the aged as their health involves not only illnesses but also a natural change called aging.

In human geriatrics, it is desirable that the aged become both the object and the subject of medical care for the reason that since medical care for the aged does not work quickly, it is not effective unless the patient is willing to continue through participation. It also requires the spirit of living positively while caring for the aging body. Buddhism can probably offer useful guidelines for it.

Self-awakening Fostered and Harmony Sought by Buddhism

Buddhism is said to be a religion of self-awakening. It leads to true self-awakening and shows the way to becoming one's true self. Buddhism argues that "one's true self is always changing through deep involvement with many persons and matters". Accordingly, in order to live better, one has to develop the attitude to see the whole without being possessed by one

aspect of the matter, to ensure harmony with others and the environment and to accept changes as they are.

How Buddhism Leads the Health of the Aged

The aged person is in the ripening period of his life. Although he has declined physically, his mental outlook has increased in depth. After experiencing a great deal, he is now a man of wisdom and rich sentiment. He should thus try to attain self-realization by making use of his developing wisdom and sentiment without being possessed by his declining physical strength.

One is subjected to various illnesses in his old age. In many cases, however, medical care should be provided not necessarily to cure the illness but to ensure harmony between the illness and life activity by easing the pain and maintaining life. It is also desirable for him to lead a fulfilling life with the help of those around him by developing his remaining abilities without being attached to his lost abilities. Buddhism leads to such a way of life.

Comprehensive Response Required for Senile Dementia

Senility has recently drawn attention in connection with the health problem of the aged. Although this is basically due to a rapid decline in mental functions caused by a change in the brain to a morbid state, what causes a living problem is the inability of the patient and of the people around him to cope with it rather than the decline in mental functions. Also, inadaptability leads to apprehension which in turn fosters inadaptability in a vicious circle. In order to sever it, it is necessary to give the patient a sense of security through skinship with his family members and close friends talking to him with sympathy. Since feelings and sentiments

are relatively well preserved, one of the roles to be played by geriatrics is to lead the patient to maintain a humane life based on them.

Positive Assistance Required to Sustain Life until the End

The old age must end in death. While accepting death, it is desirable to lead a life not possessed by death. Modern medical techniques have succeeded in removing the pain during the terminal period. However, apprehension inflates even a slight pain, resulting in an unbearable feeling. In order to eliminate apprehension, it is necessary to provide the patient with such an atmosphere that he can say what he wants to say and to maintain a dialog with a feeling. It should be pointed out that death comes to all, and not just to him only. A terminal rite used to be observed in Buddhism with the person at the final stage surrounded by those close to him, chanting prayers. Isolation and apprehension can be overcome by being deeply involved with others until a given life burns completely up. A fulfilling life in one's old age will lead one to a peaceful death.

Thus, Buddhism can perhaps serve as a guidepost, working together with geriatrics, for achieving health and self-realization in one's old age.