素食者的一大威脅：食物基因處理

GENETIC ENGINEERING:
A MAJOR THREAT TO VEGETARIANS

少有佛教徒瞭解「遺傳基因處理」是什麼回事。從微細的單細胞到人類，基因是決定所有眾生生性質的基本化學信號。把基因弄亂，就是以最基本也最嚴重的方式干擾世界的自然形態。這是非常危險，可能會因此發生難以挽回的長期性災難。然而目前國際性的大企業，正濫用「基因遺傳工程」來爭取短期的利潤。他們這種貪汙仁義道德，不顧嚴重後果的做法，令政府幾乎無法對治。

少有佛教徒對於這件事情，我們能做些甚麼呢？首先我們可以從佛法的觀點提醒人們正視這件事，同時聯絡政府及民意代表，請他們盡可能通知大眾，並且下達命令，食物上一定要加上標籤，以防患這種嚴重災難的繼續發展。至於這方面，美國生物技術政策中心，國家野生聯盟組織可提供有關資料。

Imagine a world in which as part of their basic substances tomatoes contain fish and tobacco, potatoes contain chicken, moths and other insects, and corn contains fireflies. Is this science-fiction? No, these plant-animal hybirds already exist today and may soon be on your supermarket shelves without any special labelling to warn you. Furthermore, in a few years the types of these genetically engineered "vegetables" are sure to increase and may very possibly also include human genes. If you are a vegetarian, do you want to be in the position of inadvertently eating vegetables that are part meat? Even if you are not a vegetarian, are you ready to become a cannibal and eat foods that are part human being?

Few Buddhists are aware of what genetic engineering is, the research that is being done, and the developed technologies that are now being implemented. Genes are the fundamental chemical codes that determine the physical nature of all living things, from the tiniest single-celled organism to human beings. When you tamper with the genes, you are tampering with the natural patterns of our world at the most basic and most dangerous level. This is extremely hazardous, and it will be difficult to escape the long-term dangers and disasters that will most certainly occur. Nonetheless, major international corporations are now greedily scrambling for the short-term profits to be gained through genetic engineering. Unfortunately, they are overlooking ethical issues and unconcerned about the serious consequences. Governments are providing little or no regulation.

What can we as Buddhists do about the situation? For a start, we can, in the light of the Buddhadharma, educate ourselves about what is happening. Then we can inform our governments and elected officials and urge them to do whatever is possible to inform the public, label foods, prevent the most blatant dangers, and slow down the progress on the road toward major disaster.
In the United States the Biotechnology Policy Center, National Wildlife Federation, 1400 16th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036 is a good source of information. Yet even they are unaware of fundamental Buddhist and other religious objections to genetic engineering. The United States Government welcomes direct public input to help them decide policy. You can write directly to Dockets Management Branch, HFA 305 (Docket No. 92 N-0139), Food and Drug Administration, Rm. 1-23, 12420 Parklawn Drive, Rockville, MD 20857. Senators and members of the House of Representatives can also be made aware of your concerns. I hope that readers in other countries will also become informed about this issue.

Dr. Ronald Epstein has studied with erudite and well-known psychologists and religious people. His wide travels in Europe and North Africa included a period of independent study at the University of Paris. He received a degree with honors from the psychology branch of the Social Relations Department at Harvard University.

He also served as a research assistant at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, held a National Science Foundation Stipend for psychological research, and served on numerous other research staffs. In order to understand the philosophical and religious writings of China, he learned Chinese and also became interested in meditation. After he met Venerable Master Hua, he was advised to go to Taiwan to study Chinese more deeply, and he looked for Good and Wise Advisors to help him understand proper Dharma. Returning to the United States, he took refuge with Venerable Master Hua in 1967. He received a Master's and Ph.D. in Chinese Language and Literature at the University of California at Berkeley. Devoted to the study of Dharma, he has been involved in translating Buddhist Sutras, and has orally translated the Venerable Master's Dharma talks. He has led many Westerners to the study of Buddhism. It was when he led over thirty students from Seattle to request the Dharma, that the Venerable Master Hua held a ninety-six day Shurangama Sutra Dharma Assembly and expounded the great Dharma.

Dr. Epstein has a daughter Shari and a son Andre. Shari was the first graduate of the elementary and high schools at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, and she recently graduated with a combined B.A. and M.A. in Asian Studies from Stanford University. Dr. Epstein currently teaches Philosophy and Religion at San Francisco State University.