Let's Talk About Abortion
Category : January 1993
Published by Anonymous on Jan. 01, 1993

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We have been talking about some difficult and serious subjects lately. Last month, we explored the Hindu view of suicide. It's important that we talk about these issues because otherwise they are never discussed, and problems just continue to be problems. This month we venture to speak on the unspeakable subject: abortion. It is definitely a concern, not only to women and daughters, but to husbands as well. The aborted child, if allowed to live, may have become his heir, a preeminent member of society, and tenderly cared for him and his wife in their elder years. But the man will never know and will always wonder, wonder. This week, abortion is a concern all over India, where abortion is legal. Doctors there have developed and will soon release an inexpensive version of the French "abortion pill." Many see this as a blessing for India's population problem and a safer alternative to the thousands of surgical abortions performed in India, from which many women die or suffer infections. It is perhaps a good time to reflect on another side of this issue, on the karma and on the dharma.

Wives often please their husbands by aborting an unwanted girl, but secretly wonder, "Who is she? Who was she in her past life? Will she find another womb to incarnate through? Would she perhaps have become a Florence Nightingale, Madame Curie or Anandamayi Ma, a saint like Auvaiyar or Mirabai?" The subliminal, subjective sadness that abortion brings, with all the "maybes" that lie unanswered, in itself is a sign from the soul that abortion is wrong. After all, the still, small voice of the soul sometimes speaks loudly when a heinous sin is committed, and doesn't stop talking until a counterbalancing punya, merit, is achieved and solace sought for.

What is the prayaschitta, the penance, to be done at atone for abortion? One that works very well in this modern age is to adopt a child, raise it with tender, loving care, believing this is akin to the aborted soul who sought to take refuge within the

family. This, then, atones. Mahatma Gandhi understood this principle when, one day, he counseled a Hindu man who said he had slain a Muslim in revenge for his son's killing at the Muslim's hands. He was deeply troubled about it. Gandhi advised him to adopt and raise a Muslim boy as penance for the deed.

A miscarriage is something different, an unintentional action of nature, shall we say. Try again and the same soul will come through. But Hindu scripture speaks strongly against the deliberate attempt to kill a fetus, telling us life starts at conception, when the astral body of the newborn child-to-be in the Antarloka is hovering over the bodies of the mother and father. The Kaushitaki Upanishad 3.1 describes abortion as equivalent to killing one's parents. The Atharva Veda 6.113.2 lists the fetus slayer, brunaghni, among the greatest of sinners.

We hope this is helpful. Our research with scholars and swamis tells us there is nothing within Hinduism that opposes contraceptives or birth-control methods. However, if conception occurs, the man and woman have already taken on the karmic responsibility. It is dharma's path to then open the doors of their hearts to receive him or her.

What about rape, incest, adultery or premarital pregnancies? Mothers are the life-givers of the planet. Even in these most terrible conditions, dharma gives no permission to injure, and certainly not to kill.

However, it would be a sin upon the child to be born and kill in mother in the process. This is why abortion to save the life of the mother is the one and only exception which tradition allows. Yet even that exception must not be dealt with lightly by some clever doctor or some husband falsely saying, "She might die" or "My wife's life is in peril," or by the devious wife saying, "I am going to die if I don't abort this child." It must be an honest diagnosis, not for the sake of money, not for the sake of saving face in the community, not for the sake of repudiating an infant girl. It must be an honest diagnosis, made by compassionate, dharmic doctors.

If you want to know the central principles at work here, they are ahimsa - nonviolence - the energy of God everywhere, the action of the law of karma, the strict rules of dharma defined in our holy scriptures, and the belief in reincarnation. These four make a Hindu a Hindu and make not committing abortion an obvious

decision. By accepting reincarnation, we acknowledge souls existing subtle form in astral or mental bodies waiting to incarnate through a womb. When that womb is disturbed, this is recorded as a sense of eviction for them, and a serious consequence in their reincarnational patterns, not to mention the effects on the potential mother's life, and all those connected to her.

So, we can see the consequences. This does not mean that anyone is cursing anyone, or that there is any mortal sin involved. Still, any abortion brings with it a karmic force of destruction that will come back on the mother and father who set it in motion. They may be denied a dwelling. They may be denied a noble child. They may beget a child who will persecute them all the days of their life. The price is high for abortion, much higher and more costly than giving birth, raising and educating the child and establishing him or her in life.

Let's face it, animals don't abort their children, fish don't abort their children, fowl don't abort their children and, as far as I know, microscopic organisms don't abort their children. Life must go on.

Nevertheless, abortions do happen, have happened and will happen in the future. Men and women who have participated, and their doctors and nurses, are involved in the deep karmic consequences. The action's reaction, which is karma, must be resolved in some way for a peace of mind, a quiescent state, to persist. The Hindu religion does not condemn abortion, but advises against it. This is because of the laws of personal dharma, social dharma and ahimsa - noninjury to any living creature, physically, mentally or emotionally.

Built within the great Hindu religion is the process of atonement. One becomes his own psychiatrist by utilizing the psychology that when something has happened it has to be fixed. Why would it have to be fixed? Because the person or persons involved don't feel good about the action, or the karma, which means action. Fixing is not only mending and healing, it is eradicating the memory of the event - not actually a total forgetfulness, but the emotions that comes up with the memory are eradicated. This can be done in various ways. Write to the person who was aborted and burn the letter in a fire. Explain how sorry you are, how you are feeling, and attest that you will never do it again, or that you will try to not ever do it again. This is a great way to unload a subconscious mind that is filled with guilt. Write it all down and burn it up. It is out of you. It's ashes. You don't have to tell it to a friend and worry that he will tell it to someone else, or confess it to a priest and

worry what he will do with this information. And you can avoid all those psychiatrists' fees.

Hinduism is a free-flowing religion. It threatens no enduring punishment, it preaches no mortal sin. It accepts life the way it is, even its flaws and frailties. It teaches us the right path, but knows we may not always follow that path and gives the remedies to correct what bothers us at every stage of the great journey to moksha, liberation from rebirth.

We have developed a small pamphlet "Hindu Scriptures Speak on Abortion: Views of Ancient Rishis, Doctors, Law-givers and Poets Revealed in Shruti and Smriti.' Send $2 to cover postage and handling, and we will be happy to send you a free copy.

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