

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

We Need to Stop

Killing, even lawfully by the state, is an act of violence that runs counter to Hindu dharma

BY SWAMINI MAYATTITANANDA

TO KILL FOR ANY REASON WHATSOEVER IS HIMSA—violence against nature and hurtfulness to the self. At every level of human existence, Hindu dharma—which means cosmic laws and life values in addition to life's purpose—forbids the act of slaughter and killing. Slaughtering and killing are never the answer to those who disregard societal laws and commit even the most heinous of crimes. By Hindu definition, a criminal is one who is not yet awakened to his heart—the center of consciousness. A person who forgets his human nature is certain to commit egregious acts against himself, family, community and society at large. The answer is to condemn all violent and adharmic actions, but to not condemn the human spirit of the person that commits the crime. Although wrong actions that fly against the cosmic order cannot be condoned, we do not serve societal good by administering vengeful punishment to the convicted person. Harm begets harm, hurt brings more hurt. When we kill, we kill a tangible part of the living resonant memory field within ourselves—the heart of compassion. In the *Bhagavad Gita* 18.61, Krishna informs Arjuna that Isvara, the Lord, resides in the heart of every being, giving mobility to everyone through His power of maya. Isvara protects the entire universe—and all its beings, including the wrongdoers.

No person or agency in any tradition has the right to kill. Each person has a right to live. When a person commits a crime—however heinous it might be and however ignorant he may be of his true nature—Isvara still remains entrenched within his heart. By Cosmic Law and until such time as he is awakened to his nature of divinity, he continues to accrue *papa* (negative) karma for his crimes. In the third chapter of *Sri Rudram* in the *Yajur Veda*, the Lord is described as one who also “protects” criminals, wrongdoers and *jigahmsads*, murderers. The meaning here must be clearly understood. The Lord does not condone wrongdoing. Rather, through His unlimited power to level karma by inflicting the pain of *papa* to those who earn it, He may transform the criminal mind to its spiritual recognition. To support Isvara's intention for humanity, we must be pro-active in the preservation of life.

Each one of us has inherited a set of karmas (including our genetic precursors) that can uphold, suppress, excel or diminish our life's purpose, or push us in the direction of garnering *punya* (positive) karma, or in the unfortunate way of *papa* karma. These characteristics impact our physical, mental and psychic dispositions—the way we think, feel, experience and respond to life shapes the way in which we assimilate life. The degree to which we grow into healing past karmas depends on how committed we are to developing our inner awareness and helping others to do so.

To fully live our karma in dharma, we are called to safeguard the collective human psyche. As I see it, the collective crimes, illness and grief of the modern world are due to the loss of our memory of, and connection with, each other as a family of humanity. At present, the collective karma of the human psyche is experiencing a profound sense of fragility and loss as a direct response



to the quantum violence that surrounds us. This psychic fragility in both the individual and society may be the most significant malaise of our time. It leads to the breakdown of dharma in relation to our family, global community and nature. To kill those who are found guilty of heinous crimes can only add to this collective psychic fragility in a culture already inundated with violence, abuse and despair.

To support and realize this transformation in society, we urgently need to revamp and restructure our entire educational structure within prisons and detention camps so that prisoners can be educated physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually to reform their behavior. Witness the massive degree of violence, hurtfulness and crimes, wretched and inhumane activities that occur within the walls of the present prison systems. To inundate this already myopic methodology of crime and punishment with capital punishment is simply insane. No form of revengeful punishment works.

Because the foundation on which Hinduism is based is dharma, it is not in the Hindu way of life to seek revenge—to “take an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.” Ultimately, this fear-motivated way of thinking leaves the entire world in a blind and hopeless quagmire. For those of us who rush to enforce capital punishment for the legally condemned, let us pause for a moment and explore our definition of what we may consider a “criminal mind”? Are these only the people who hurt or kill other humans? What of the greater energies of dire despair, hurtfulness, poverty and egregious crimes committed every moment of every day which most people condone and in which an even greater number participate. For example, the billions of poverty-stricken people in our so-called world of privilege and power, or the slaughtering of millions of animals every day, or the crimes committed by science through its hurtful exploitation of the maternal energy in its endless killings of the mice, monkeys, fruit flies and so on.

The greatest good we can do as individuals who are awakened to our divine nature is to educate the wrongdoer, establish a culture of kindness that strives to forge the necessary pathways to educate, inform and transform the mind of the egregious and the aggrieved. The common factor that all criminals share is the same as that of the poor and the underprivileged—a lack of nurturing, educational support, unconditional love and spiritual culture. Only self-knowledge of our own divinity can free any one of us from ignorance of our true nature. Human beings give themselves permission to do terrible things until we discover who we really are: *Aham brahmanasi*—“I am that immortal Consciousness!”

The highest personal sacrifice we can make is to embrace the oneness of spirit imbued in the Self and nonseparation from the humanity of each other. When we set ourselves apart from wrongdoers by condemning them to death, we take away their Isvara-given right to live. In so doing, we deprive ourselves of the magnificent inner growth of awareness in helping a person who has transgressed their goodness to transform their lives into spiritual understanding.

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