Let's Talk About Murder
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After returning from three weeks in India, the following Associated Press report was brought to my attention. Please tell me this is not true. "In Salem, India, the message officials deliver to parents is 'Don't kill your baby, abandon her.' In a male-dominated society, where millions of poor families live on the edge of survival, female infants are seen as a financial burden and often are killed...In one region of Tamil Nadu, state government agencies found that female infanticide touches one family in two...Everybody knows about it, but nobody complains."

In southern India a creative cradle program has been started by Chief Minister Ms. Jayalalitha Jayaram. White cradles have been provided at 116 hospitals where families may leave unwanted children anonymously, with the knowledge that they will be taken care of in homes or state orphanages. This is the first real social effort to deal with Indian indigent village families feeling they have no choice but to get rid of girl children. This gives them an option. Eighteen infants were left in the cradles during November and December.

It was explained to me that this is not happening among the rich or the educated. They don't abandon their girl children. But they have abandoned their poorer neighbors. The solution is to stop ignoring it, speak out, punish murderers and work on literacy among women. There is no excuse for this, not even a wretched dowry system where poor families find it impossible - or inconvenient? - to raise girls, knowing that marriage demands may ruin a family's economy.

Infanticide is just part of the problem. Women face so many other frightening trials. To be born a girl and die an old woman takes a lot of good karma and skillful management of one's personal life. If the abortionist doesn't get you before you are

born, then death through medical neglect, abandonment or poison might. Escaping that, if virginity is a question, a suitable husband can't be found, causing a casual kerosene fire. If a woman survives to marriage, she has to live through the possibility of a dowry murder. Now, if she survives all of this but her husband dies first, in some communities she is expected to throw herself on the funeral pyre, for widows are taboo. All those watching her do this and not restraining her, are they not accomplices to murder? Murder is often punishable by death. In fact, I read in a shastra that death should occur within the lifetime of the murderer to swiftly alleviate the karmas so that he need not go through the inconvenience of being murdered in another life. That shastra was definitely supportive of capital punishment.

Even if the extreme of death is avoided, we are still left with the beating of the child which is a kind of psychological murder, killing creativity, killing love and trust and awakening fear. A five-foot-ten-inch adult beating on a tiny child - what cowardliness. A muscular man slapping a woman who can't fight back. What cowardliness. Yet another kind of cowardliness belongs to those who stand by, doing nothing to stop known instances of harm and injury in their community. Such crimes, even if the law does not punish, earn a lifetime imprisonment in the criminal's own karma, because they always know that they watched or knew and said nothing. This sin grants lifetime imprisonment in their own mind. Beating a child destroys his or her faith. It destroys faith in humanity and therefore in religion and in God. If his father and mother beat him, who is he going to trust throughout his whole life? Child beating is very destructive.

Unless beaten and tortured in this life, these parents must be born again and again to reap well-earned rewards. The great epic tells us that Rama killed Ravana to retrieve his beloved Sita who had been captured, taken to Sri Lanka. Though Ravana may have deserved it, Rama created a sin by his action. A rishi said the prayaschitta, or reconciliation, he had to perform was to build a Siva temple. Rama built the great temple of Rameshvaram to atone for his sin in this life, so that he would not have to be born again and again to atone for it later. How will modern-day violators atone?

Let's face it, murder is a sin no matter how we look at it. Ahimsa, noninjury - physically, mentally or emotionally - is the benign antidote to murder, which is putting an end to someone's physical, mental and emotional life. Killing daughters, killing wives, wives being expected to kill themselves if the husband dies, beating wives into submission, beating children into fearful obedience - is this what Hindu culture is about? Tell me if I am wrong about the above, if I have been informed

incorrectly. Please write some loving letters to Ms. Jayaram. Tell her that she is doing the right thing. Encourage her and laud her ability to face this infanticide that has now been exposed to the international media.

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