

[Hindu Scriptures are Clear on Abortion](#)

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"Do Not Cut the Thread of Progeny"; Though Irreligious Mores Overshadow our Times, the World's Oldest Faith Defines Dharma and Challenges Obedience

Vedantham, T. R. There are many interesting and beautiful references to the subject of procreation, progeny, pregnancy, motherhood, etc., in the Vedas and the later religious literature. The scriptural commandment is there, of course, clear and plain. The Taittreya Upanishad states specifically: Prajathanthum Ma Vyavathchethsehi - "Do not cut the thread of progeny!" But in India, all restrictions are relaxed. Anybody can go and get aborted just for the asking, expenses nil. In the case of a married woman the husband's consent is necessary. Otherwise it is all a clear line. Instead of obstacles, it is encouragement. Dr. Guillotine during the French Revolution told the victims who were beheaded: "Monsieurs, this is my daughter, La Guillotine. With her help I will just whisk off your heads in the wink of an eye and it shall not pain you." The family planning centers and the government hospitals and private nursing homes provide ample facilities for abortions.

The majority in the Hindu community, the educated and the uneducated, feel horrified. Some among the Westernized elitist class feel somewhat reconciled. The more Westernized groups, mostly non-Hindus, feel there is nothing wrong in abortion so long as there is a necessity for it, and if it is safe. All Hindu organizations and institutions are opposed to it, but they have not yet taken a strong official position. The will to resist is rather weak at the moment, but the tempo is escalating and the implications are serious. Very soon the resistance movement will get going in full swing.

Scriptural References: Our religious books emphasize the respect to be shown to one's parents and ancestors, Pithrus, if not for any other reason, for the reason that we owe our existence to them. The duty that we owe to them is referred to as Pithru Rinam. Take another instance. Taittreya Upanishad talks of the interrelation of things. One such example is: "The Mother is the first form, the father is the last form. Progeny is the link. The procreative function is the medium through which this linkage functions." There is nothing mysterious about it. But the implied

meaning is profound. The mother is on the top, the father only at the bottom of the structure, its support, as it were.

There is a Veda mantram which is said as advice to the bride at the time of marriage. Moordhanam Pathyur Aroha, Prajaya cha Virat Bhava. Some people think that it just introduces an element of humor into a situation otherwise serious. No, it cannot be that. The meaning of the mantram is, "When you go to your husband's house, sit on his head and rule over him. When finally you attain motherhood, you will become the queen ruling over an empire." It is elliptical and allegorical. It condenses within itself the whole philosophy of life's fulfillment and the profound importance of the part the woman has to play in it for her own fulfillment.

There is a blessing given the couple during the marriage ceremony: "They blossom like the flower, then they attain parenthood, and then all the wealth of the world comes to them." The emphasis is on parenthood as Life's Fulfillment. Progeny is something more than a joy to the parents. It is a contribution to society as well. We owe humanity and the society around us a debt, as shown in the following verse: "In this ever-changing world, who is there that is born but never dies? And where are the dead who are not born again. But he is emancipated through whom the world and the society around him is uplifted. If this is not the case, then a man has lived in vain."

During our adult years, we have our usual conjugal life and the pleasures of the world. When we grow old, sex life as such comes to an end. Then starts what can be described as "love life." In our present-day society, it is the rare privilege of only a very few, and that, too, only those who have children, because in them the husband and the wife become merged into one. In our present-day permissive society, we lose this pleasure and privilege even when we are quite young. The precondition for success in this field is laid down in the famous ritual Sapta Padi, the rite of seven steps taken during the Hindu marriage ceremony. We don't understand its importance, and old age becomes a meaningless burden, and like Tithonus we weep for death to come and take us away.

Thiruvalluvar, a famous Tamil poet and philosopher, has something interesting to say in this area: "The gratitude that a father owes his son is to ensure that the son stands foremost in the company of the learned." That it is the duty of the father to give his son a decent education is admitted. But who is to be grateful to whom? It is the father who should be grateful to the son says Thiruvalluvar, and not the other

way, because the son has made the father and his ancestors immortal. The father lives physically and spiritually in his children.

Yet another Veda mantram illustrates this point. After the child is just one year old there is a birthday celebration. A ritual known as Anna Prasanam is gone through. Kheer or payasamis prepared with milk, ghee, sugar, honey and flavoring. The father holds the child and the mother hands over to him three spoonfuls of the sweet juice one after another and the father feeds it into the mouth of the child while reciting the mantram: Athmavai Puthranamasi Sa Jeeva Sarada Satham. It means "My son, you are not different from me. You are myself. May you live a hundred years." The father looks on the son as his own Athma Pratibhimum, the image of his own soul reflected.

Even the flesh and blood of the parents and the children vibrate to the same frequency. In the famous play Sakuntalam of Kalidasa, King Dhushyanta suddenly comes upon a scene in the forest in which a little boy is teasing a lioness by holding her cub in his hands. The boy is not impressed by the risky venture he is engaged in. The king gets a very strange feeling in which his body and soul in one great emotion are drawn toward the boy. He wants to go and take the boy in his arms, hug him and kiss him. The boy happens to be his own son whom he has not seen before.

There are many more beautiful ideas about fatherhood, motherhood and childhood in our religious literature. The emotional attachment of the mother to the child is a gigantic phenomena commensurate with the heavens. There is a beautiful poem of Rabindranath Tagore in Crescent Moon in which the child asks the mother, "Where did I come from? Where did you pick me up?" Half sobbing and half laughing the mother replies: "You were hidden in my heart as its desire my darling. In the lap of the deathless spirit that rules our home you have been nursed for ages. When in girlhood my heart was opening its petals, you hovered as a fragrance over it. Your tender softness bloomed in my youthful limbs like a glow in the east before sunrise. Heaven's first darling twin born with the morning light, you have floated down the stream of life and at last you have been stranded on my heart. For fear of losing you I hold you tight to my breast. When I look on thy face, mystery overwhelms me. You who belong to all have become mine. What magic has snared this world's treasure in these slender arms of mine!"

What is the relevance of all this to the problem of abortion? If the child is an avatar

and 'God incarnate,' and yet he is a detached piece of the original parental substance; if he is the image of the father, reflected body and soul; if, as the Greeks say, children are the joy of the world; if motherhood is the ultimate joy and fulfillment of a woman's life; and if every mother happens to be Janani Jaganmatha Goddess mother of the world; when you murder a foetus and throw it in a dust bin, what is it you are doing?

Decades ago I saw a film "White Shadows of the South Seas." The islanders go fishing in a shallow lagoon and bring up a lot of pearl oysters. They open the shells and scoop the jelly, chew it and spit the pearls into the water. They do not know the value of pearls. Our commercialized, industrialized, permissive society has degenerated to a very low level. We are becoming barbarians. We spit the pearls away because we don't know their value in the world here and hereafter.

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