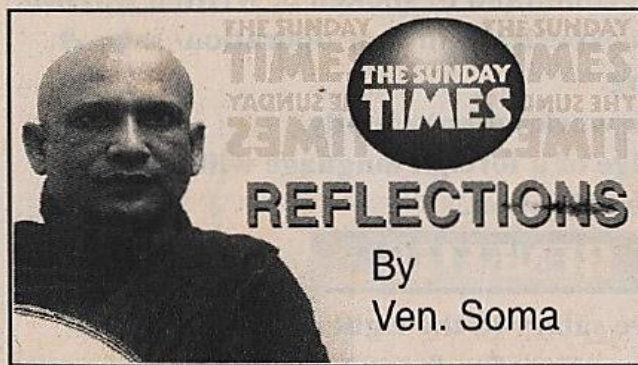


Drown your sins with good deeds. (1999, September 19). *The Sunday times*.

Drown your sins with good deeds



While on the subject of killing, many people question as to the depth of sin involved in legally imposing the death penalty. The judge when giving the sentence is connected to the sin by ordering the death, while the executioner commits the sin by ending a life.

The sin committed by the judge is an '*anaththika*' sin of commanding, while the executioner's sin is shown as '*sāhaththika*'. This is decided by the '*chethanava*' (intention). It is difficult to decide whose intention is stronger. Sometimes it seems that the intention behind the execution, the '*sahaththika*' sin is stronger.

Without any fault of ones own due to a delay a life may be lost. If one did not have any intention leading up to this loss of life, this alone cannot cause one to bear the consequences of killing. To think that repentance and remorse can in any way lessen the resultant reaction (*karma vipaka*) of deliberate killing is a misconception. Some religions teach that by repentance one can liberate oneself from the sin. According to Buddhism this is an immature and unintelligent approach.

Therefore instead of repentance, Buddhism shows, "*yassa kamman kathan papan kusalena*

In a case which is heard over several days or several hours it is difficult to gauge the judges exact feelings about the case. With regard to a heinous crime, after having heard the evidence, the judge may be incensed. It is difficult to assess the anger within the judge towards the killer. A verdict of death penalty given at that moment would constitute a powerful sin. If a man had in order to appease his children's hunger attempted to rob and in the process had killed someone, and if this killing was shown to be a premeditated murder he too would receive the death sentence. If when ordering his sentence, the judge is disturbed knowing he had killed only to ease the hunger of his children, and therefore hesitates when issuing the verdict the intention here would be much weaker.

Therefore the sin of killing varies in depth according to the intention which leads to the act of killing. The executioner engages in the act of killing by carrying out instructions given to him. He too receives different degrees of resultant sin based on the spirit with which he engages in the act. Therefore let alone a human being not even a god would be able to predict what resultant reaction (*karma vipaka*) will come upon the judge when delivering a death sentence, nor what resultant reaction (*karma vipaka*) will come upon the executioner when carrying out this death sentence.

Although some argue that since this occurs at the time the thought leading to the action is formed, and is due to the dictates of the law how then can it be a sin, it must not be forgotten that what is important here is the intention leading up to the action. The Buddha stated "*chethanahan bhikkha ve kamman vadami*" - the intention leading up to the action is what counts more than the act itself.

phithiyathi". The meaning here is that the good that one does shelters one to an extent from any sin that one commits. Therefore instead of repenting, to decide not to repeat this sin and to do contradictory good deeds which will bring positive results is more important at this time. What is meant here by contradictory good deeds is to refrain from harming beings and to show loving kindness, and compassion towards all animals.

This is explained when defining the first precept of Buddhism -

"panathipatha pativiratho hoti nihitha dandho - nihitha sathho lajji dayapanno sabbhapanabhutha hithanukampi viharathi.

What is meant here by refraining from killing is the determination which leads to this. '*Dandho*' means sticks and clubs. Get rid of sticks, clubs and weapons, and be ashamed to use them to kill. Develop sympathy, compassion and loving kindness towards all living beings.

According to this it is one's responsibility, irrespective of race or religion, to decide whether it is more important for one to repent the sin already committed, or else in the way the Buddha preached to act in a manner that will efface one's sinful act. Therefore if by some chance a sin is committed by a person, Buddhism implies that such a person is not a sinner for all time. If there is a person who has committed a sin in the past according to Buddhism he has no call to dwell in remorse. What he should do is simply identify the wrong he did as wrong, and act in such a manner as to reduce the resultant reaction by engaging in good deeds. These words of the Buddha reflect this meaning, "*achchayan achchayatho disva yatha pachchayan karohi*"