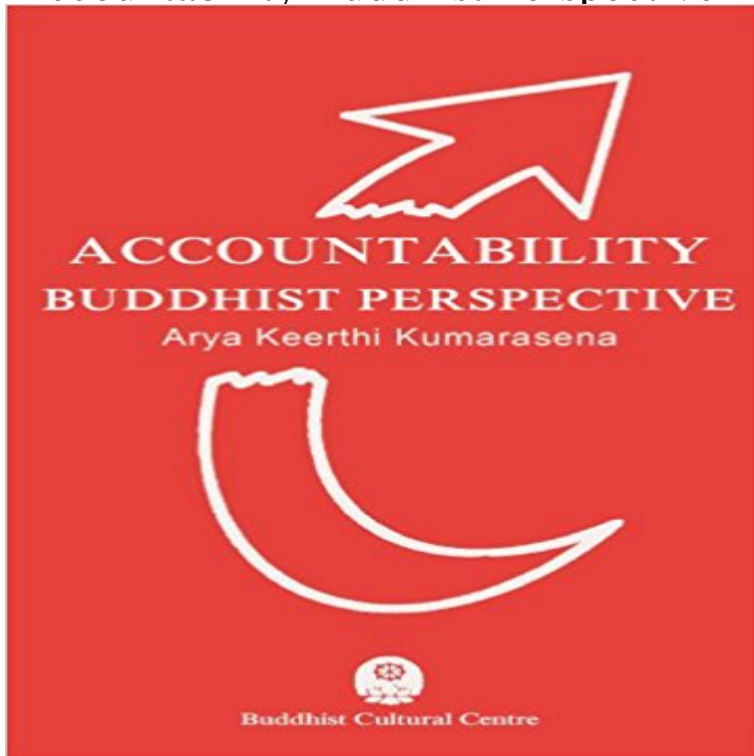


Accountability Buddhist Perspective



The word, accountability became a very important term to the world community, especially to the Sri Lankans, after the United Nations Secretary General (UNSG) published the report of the expert panel appointed by him. In fact UNSG emphasised the importance of accountability in the joint statement signed by him and the Sri Lankan President. Though the word accountability is used quite frequently by many persons, meaning of this word is somewhat ambiguous, except in the areas directly related to accounts. According to the above report, accountability has to be defined considering the background that prevails in the country, combined with contemporary international practices. Therefore the relevant concept remains undefined, although it has been repeatedly stressed by several prominent persons in various forums. As the background situation in Sri Lanka is heavily influenced by the Buddhist perspective of the accountability process, discussion on this topic cannot be further postponed. This book addresses mainly the Buddhist view of accountability process that usually enhance the social fabric. However most of the associated concepts are strongly related to the personal aspects of the accountability as well. As such, wherever applicable personal aspect of the accountability processes has to be discussed without any reservations. Accountability processes of other religions are not identical to that of Buddhism, although there are certain similarities. Therefore it is useful to discuss the similarities and the differences of the key issues among major religions, as the basis of the international trends should be strongly correlated to the broad spectrum of religious ideologies. In general there is a tendency to restrict accountability processes to those actions/decisions that have been taken already. However it has to be extended to include the decisions not

taken and the actions not implemented, as failure to take decisions or inability to take prompt actions can lead to more harmful situations, compared to the other alternatives available. Accountability process should be used to achieve a clearly defined objective. The need to change existing systems of administration/legislation etc., training people to prevent recurrence of harmful situations, discontinuation of the services of unsuitable persons etc. can be included in such objectives. Punishment can also create forced discipline due to fear, thereby preventing others to resort to actions that could lead to similar results. Although some people believe vengeance as an objective related to accountability, it is not an acceptable principle according to Buddhism and many other religions. In addition to the system related problems, individual weaknesses and certain actions of some people can also cause damage. Therefore, in addition to the assessment of the damage as a whole, the individuals who are involved in the related processes should also be included in the investigative procedures, in an accountability process. Special investigation procedures are required in certain cases to speed up the process. However these procedures can only find the probable facts to initiate normal judicial procedures, which is relatively slow due to involvement of several professionals such as police officers, forensic experts, lawyers, Judges etc. Further no one can be punished of any offence on account of a law that did not exist at the time of committing the crime, according to the international law. Accountability process should be measured in terms of cost benefit, and therefore unnecessary costs and delays should be avoided. It should be relatively simple and acceptable to the society. Buddhist aspect of accountability process is an embodiment of the above mentioned qualities and therefore very likely to provide many benefits.

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