

# The Suicides

In recent years more and more people have come to believe that death is not the end, that it is a shedding of the physical body prior to entering a new kind of existence. Many have gone as far as the GATES OF HEAVEN, so to speak, and have returned to their physical bodies inspired and enlightened by the experience. They feel the joy and the beauty of that other dimension of life. They see a glorious figure of light and realize that it is an event which they will gladly welcome when their time comes for a final departure. However, no one should be tempted to terminate life ahead of time in order to experience that joy, or deliberately seek release from an undesirable, unhappy life in order to be free of burdens. To willfully destroy one's physical life in the childish notion that either joy or oblivion will be the reward, is to misinterpret the whole meaning of birth, life, and death.

Life is the God-given opportunity to work out one's problems, not to avoid them! And in spite of all its suffering and struggle, physical life still remains the great opportunity, the supreme challenge. Mistakenly believing that by an act of murder (for suicide is self-murder) we gain easy access to the promised land of joy and beauty is a complete misunderstanding of the law of the universe. We are here to learn, to grow, to become more divinely human. It is only when we have completely finished with our schooling that we graduate to the next grade where we receive our reward. To cut short life's journey in the physical world in order to avoid the hardships, pain, and responsibilities not only leaves unfulfilled the purpose for which we were born, but also delays our greater opportunity in the bright world beyond death.

The life script handed to each one of us at birth is a special and sacred document, our inheritance for better or for worse. Whatever that script contains is given to each of us for a purpose, for our growth and understanding. It matters little what the grade is in this school of life, but it does matter greatly how much effort we expend. The mistakes are unimportant, for to be human is to err. It is the learned lesson that counts. To tear up the life script in a moment of

discouragement only retards the program and brings far greater distress than the momentary pain which prompted the act.

For whatever reason, premeditated or willful, suicide must be shunned as the worst possible way to escape. One of the most heartbreaking sights is the plight of the suicide. I came upon them quite unexpectedly one day when I was in the midst of a session of mental imagery. It was a picture which I will never, never forget.

I felt myself going down, down, down until I came to a shallow, narrow stream of water. It blocked my progress and I could go no further. I stopped and considered as the familiar inward feeling of quiet detachment and heightened awareness signalled that a new and important teaching was going to be presented. I knew that another lesson was about to be learned, and I was glad that a friend was there to support me and to take the notes.

Fully conscious, but deeply immersed in the picture that was presented, I felt a dull, heavy foreboding envelop me. Everything about the place where I found myself seemed alien and strange to me, and I began to describe in words, as best I could, the indescribable. The air was still; not a breath stirred. On the opposite side of the bank a few gnarled trees were stuck in the muddied earth. The river flowed quietly, sluggish as though mesmerized into denying its natural expression.

As I looked across the stream I became aware that there was something weird about the endless line of shaped mounds that hugged the opposite bank of that river. As I looked closer in that dim light, I realized that this was not mounds of dirt that I had come upon, but human shapes so completely covered by their dark shrouds, so completely bent over with their heads buried in the mud, that they had become unrecognisable, one with the soil.

Lying there, still and mysteriously silent, they presented a strange, unnatural picture. I wondered what they had done to bring them to such a low, miserable state. Whatever crime they had committed, the price was terribly high. A great wave of pity overwhelmed me as I sensed their utter misery and hopelessness. I stood helplessly on my side of the river and realized that I had no way of communicating with these shrouded beings, so completely were they immersed in their

own bleak world of gloom and despair. Stuck in the mud, so to speak, they were unaware of anything else but their own misery. They were completely shut off!

Suddenly from the far distant hilltop, silhouetted against the sky, a lone figure of a man emerged, the only moving thing in this still and sombre region. I watched as he jauntily began his descent. He seemed almost on the run, almost eager and expectant. But as he came closer his step slackened and his body slumped. He looked back from where he had come and tried to retrace his steps, but he was powerless to make the reversal. I watched as he fought against the downward pull. He struggled as a man struggles against a furious hurricane, helpless against nature's heavy odds. He was forced into making the unwanted descent!

The closer he came, the more familiar to me he became, and in spite of the horror and fear distorting his features, I recognized him. It was Fred, a man who had recently committed suicide! At that moment I knew for the first time where I was and what I was observing. This was the Land of Despair, the land of the suicides. I was no longer mystified. Poor Fred, the newcomer, had clarified it for me.

I yearned to comfort that terrified man. He had led such a carefree happy-go-lucky life. He was a great sports fan. Golf and skiing were his hobbies and occupied most of his time. He took his responsibilities lightly, a perfectly harmless, fun-loving, delightful individual whom everyone liked. But when things got rough and his neglected business failed, heavily in debt, unable to indulge in the sports which he loved, he evidently had decided that it would be easier for him and his family if he just ended it all. He committed suicide.

I don't know what he thought about death, if he thought about it at all, but I was sure that at this moment of realization he would have struggled with his problems, difficult as they were, rather than come to this desolate, forsaken place. Whatever he had run away from was nothing compared with what he had run into! The peace of mind, the release from problems for which he had destroyed himself, was a false hope. The easy way out failed to live up to its promise. By his own irrevocable act he had unwittingly chosen the wrong path.

I called out to Fred. He heard, in the manner peculiar to

those existing in that dimension of life called death. A look of incredulity and relief spread over his face as he recognized me on the other side. A way out perhaps? He ran eagerly to the edge of the river and tried desperately to enter the water separating us, but now the lazy, stagnant river seemed to become a wild raging torrent. Each time he tried to step into it a terrible rush of water seemed to push him back. I watched helplessly as he tried to cross the impassable barrier separating us. He fought valiantly for what seemed like a very long time until finally, spent and exhausted, he gave up. Seated dejectedly with his head in his hands, the tears flowed profusely and uncontrollably, mingling with the river water. It was no use. The odds were against him. He looked around at his new home, the barren land, the unsavoury companions, and shuddered. He was trapped! There was no escape!

Again I called out to Fred. He had been so involved in his desperate fight to cross the river that he had forgotten me. He looked up surprised that I was still there. The 'words' of comfort and instructions which flowed from me came from that source far beyond my puny personal self. A moment before, I was questioning why I was being shown such a seemingly hopeless condition and what if anything I was supposed to do about it. Surely I must have been catapulted into this situation for a more important reason than just mere unprovoked sightseeing! Always before, the inner experience had served a definite purpose. Fred, appearing as he did, clarified for me the mystifying picture. I was no longer puzzled. I learned from his unhappy appearance the lesson for all suicides, the distressful results of suicidal acts. It was an unforgettable lesson for me. But what about Fred? Our meeting in this most unlikely place could not be a capricious act of the gods. Every confrontation in life is meaningful, and I sensed that this particular meeting contained a deep significance for Fred as well as for me.

I questioned, and the answers came rapidly from the inner Self. First of all Fred was told he must never under any circumstances surrender himself to the hopeless condition of the beings in this region. Never, never again was he to seek the easy way out or give up, here or anywhere else! That was his personal message.

He learned that he could not escape, and that no one can run away from the consequences of his own premeditated

acts. Violence is repaid by violence, despair by despair. It is the Law, unbreakable, but not unmerciful.

Fred, however, was being offered a great opportunity to help these forlorn and seemingly deserted beings. It would be work, hard work. But he had been chosen for the task because he had the qualities which could be useful in this situation. I knew what was meant. Fred's happy-go-lucky nature, his popularity and ease with people made him the ideal messenger for bringing hope to the hopeless. He must contact each one of these deserted beings and bring them out of their lethargy. Some would respond, he was told, for they had repented long enough. Others would refuse to listen, their need for self-punishment still overwhelming them.

"Don't waste your efforts on the stubborn ones." Fred was told, "They are not ready yet, and in a sense are enjoying their self-punishment. Some are still in the process of completing their term, waiting for the fires of purification to burn out all destructive thoughts and feelings. They too are not quite ready for your help. But there are many others who have already served out their term, who can and will respond, eager and ready to rise up and begin the return to redemption. The new arrivals have a different lesson to learn," the instructions continued. "They must be told about the law of cause and effect which operates in both the material and immaterial worlds."

No one can smash a fragile piece of china against a brick wall without shattering the china. No one can fire a bullet through his heart or head without destroying his life. There is no punishment for these acts, simply an adherence to the unbreakable law. Some of these new arrivals would be amenable to Fred's explanations, and again he must concentrate his efforts on those willing to learn. There would be enough of them to keep him occupied for a long time. The uncooperative ones would have to learn the longer harder way.

"Never coerce," Fred was instructed. "Never force your will on any of them. Never interfere with each soul's right to learn by his own mistakes, exercising his own God-given free will. No one knows what is right for that other self. Don't judge! Don't interfere! Don't look for results!"

Before leaving, I pointed out to Fred a slim streak of

light shining from the far distant hilltops. Dim as it was, it was bright enough to show the way to the Promised Land. The Light of Hope in this land of despair!

The picture began to fade. The last I saw of Fred, he was busily engaged in fulfilling his assignment, touching the crouched figures as some began to stir. I was happy for him. The scene faded out. My service was no longer required. His service was just beginning.

I was not allowed to forget the lesson, nor would I want to. I have never ceased to marvel and wonder at the synchronicity of such experiences. Each time a strange new lesson was presented, I never had to wait very long before being challenged to apply the recently acquired knowledge to a life situation. The inner experience, mystical and strange to my practical nature, was constantly being made useful by its immediate application to an urgent problem. It was uncanny, a way of dispelling my natural tendency to doubt and hence delay in accepting the new knowledge.

A few days after the encounter with Fred, a woman who had often discussed with me her problems came to see me, more discouraged and disheartened than ever. Without preamble she belligerently announced, "I can't see the purpose of continuing this miserable existence of mine. I am sick and tired of it all. Life holds nothing for me but pain, struggle, and loneliness. I am going to make an end of it." I shuddered, my recent vision of the suicides still haunting me.

"No," I protested. "Please, anything is better than that. Suicide is will-full murder!"

"But I have always believed that we are free agents, free to make our own decisions," she insisted, "and that free choice is God's gift to all of us."

"Yes, that's correct," I answered. "

Then if I choose to destroy my life," she persisted, "what is wrong? It's my life and I should be able to do what I want without being considered a murderer. I don't call it murder if I decide I will be happier dead.

She challenged me and I knew that she was very serious and needed help. I considered her difficult life, her insurmountable problems. Her husband had deserted her many years ago and left her with two young children and a mother

to support. She had worked hard and struggled to make some kind of life for all of them. Against heavy odds she had succeeded, but the fruits of her labour were bitter. Her mother, self-centred and demanding, brought her no comfort. On the contrary, as the years went by she had become more querulous and difficult. The two boys, never fully appreciating their mother's struggles, seemed to blame her for the loss of their worthless father. They gave her no consideration, no love, only resentment and indifference. The boys, grown men now, had left her and the mother was her sole wearisome companion. She concluded that the responsibility of raising her children was over and that state welfare could provide for her mother. The present and the future looked bleak to her. A way out beckoned, suicide.

Without hesitation I launched into a description of the Land of the Suicides. When I finished I said to her, "Now you are free to make your choice. You have had a mistaken idea about the other side of life. You thought, as many do, that by killing yourself you would be released from your suffering and be given either the keys to heavenly peace and happiness or the opportunity to slip into a state of oblivion. Neither is true, but you are free to believe me or not. I can't help you any more than by sharing with you one of the most deeply moving experiences of my life."

Then I did something that I rarely, if ever do. I literally went down on my knees, put my arms around her and pleaded with her to consider thoughtfully the possibility that what I told her might be true. She reconsidered and the last I heard of her she was still struggling to handle her life responsibilities. As I attempt to write this story of Fred and the suicides, I maintain that I have to relate what I have witnessed and what I have experienced. Proof? Scientifically there is none.

Whatever we do, we must bear witness.

We must communicate.

Elie Wiesel

Our birth is but a sleep  
And a forgetting:

The Soul that rises with us, our Life's Star,  
Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
And cometh from afar:  
Not in entire forgetfulness,  
And not in utter nakedness,  
But trailing clouds of glory we do come  
From God, who is our home.

*Ode on Intimations of Immortality*

Wordsworth