

CHAPTER 11

Suicide

A tragic event happened in our class. Two of our classmates, Ilya and Kostya, committed suicide by throwing themselves out of a 14th floor window.

As with every suicide there are always reasons why it happens. Those reasons are created by people. Is suicide therefore a kind of self-murder? There is no single person who can be blamed because everybody is guilty in a sense!

Ilya was obsessed with the idea of suicide. He would say, "You must be *somebody* or you needn't live at all. But whatever I do, nothing comes of it". He tried to commit suicide several times in the last three years but always survived.

On Wednesday, instead of going to school Kostya went to Ilya's place. At 11:20 a.m. several people saw them falling from the 14th floor. They didn't even scream.

When we heard about it the next day we didn't believe it at first. After school we all went to see the person who was investigating this case. He said that notes had been found in both Ilya's and Kostya's pockets about who they were and where they lived. Kostya had also left a note at home saying "went to save Ilya". The woman who opened the entrance door for them said that, as they were passing by, she overheard Kostya trying to talk Ilya out of his plan. He was saying that either they would both jump or neither of them would.

Ilya had his sixteenth birthday just two weeks before while Kostya was still only fifteen.

Ilya came from a well-off family. He had everything, but his parents never paid much attention to him and he was always left alone. I remember him telling me about a dream he had four years ago. He

dreamt that he had died and that red roses were brought to his grave where they opened immediately. At his funeral, you might not believe it, when red roses were thrown into his grave, they opened a few minutes later. If somebody had told me this I wouldn't have believed him and would have



thought that it was just someone's imagination (God knows what may be seen by a person who has lost a friend), but I saw it with my own eyes!

Kostya lived with his mother, and now she is all alone! He always tried to help everybody, was very clever, liked chemistry and biology, wrote poems and loved his mother very much. He always confided in her, told her everything. And now he has made her feel so lonely! Kostya himself used to say that committing suicide is the last thing he would do.

Kostya was an extraordinary person, very much like his mother: kind, compassionate and tender. After everything that's happened we visited her several times; we feel so sorry for her and want to help her but we don't know what to do. What can we do to make her feel a little better? By the way, what happens to a person after his death? It cannot be that our friends go nowhere. Where do they go? Why is our life so cruel and why do things like this happen?"

The letter you have just read is not made up. This really happened. Can you imagine being how these boys' parents must have felt? How about their classmates? Things could have been sorted out a day or two before all of it happened. If only Ilya's parents had stayed home that day. If only some boys had come by and taken Ilya with them to school. If, if, if... And all of a sudden there is only —emptiness, nothingness.

You may or may not have come across such a tragedy in your own life. But let us think about the fact that *one in ten high school students reach the point where they ask themselves: to live or not to live?* Some only think about suicide. Some actually attempt to commit suicide and fail. But for others, this attempt will be the last event of their lives.

This problem is serious enough to reflect on. First of all, let us try to understand what makes many teenagers take this fatal step?

It would seem that the decision to commit suicide is an extreme step taken by a person who has decided that his problems are insoluble. Interviews with teenagers who recovered from suicide attempts at first glance seem to indicate the opposite. One girl could not give any reason except, "Well, I quarreled with my boyfriend." Another girl said, "No real reason, except for a quarrel with my parents."

The problem is that easily teenagers can come to the point where they see everything very narrowly and in a negative way. All they see are troubles and misfortunes. They may come to feel a deep sense of hopelessness and finally conclude that life is not worth continuing.

The tragedy of suicide is that most problems teenagers face can be alleviated if proper attention is paid to them. What may appear to be an irreparable tragedy to someone in a psychological crisis is in reality a trifling difficulty.

Perhaps, this subject wouldn't be worth too much attention but an intriguing moral question was asked in the above letter: "*As with every suicide there are always*





reasons why it happens. Those reasons are created by people. Is suicide therefore a kind of self-murder? There is no single person who can be blamed because everybody is guilty in a sense!"

From this point of view we are all guilty when a suicide takes place because of our hardheartedness and blindness. Suicide is a sign of the callousness of the human condition. It implies that we didn't notice that somebody nearby was in despair and needed our help. Even a failed suicide attempt is a

great personal tragedy.

Let us think about that terrible event that was described in the letter. Several times Ilya tried to commit suicide because he considered himself to be a failure. As he said, *"You must be somebody or you needn't live at all. But whatever I do, nothing comes of it"*.

What determines a person's value? If we believe that the value of a human being is determined solely by his intellectual abilities, then we are far less valuable than modern computers. Only a couple of hundred geniuses might qualify as being worthy to live. This is a rather gloomy outlook.

So, for what do we value our friends and relatives? Is it for their intelligence? We may in part, but not for this alone. We also value them for their courage, integrity, beauty, generosity, sincerity, honesty, selflessness, ability to love, sense of humor and so on. If we look into ourselves, we'll find that each of us has a unique combination of these and other qualities. *Everyone* is talented and beautiful in his own way; you only need to discover your own uniqueness. Rather than concentrating on our shortcomings but instead seeking to develop our good qualities, other people will also see our best selves. They will appreciate our character and love us more.

If we go back once more to the reasons for suicide, they may seem to be quite different: a quarrel with parents, broken relations with a boyfriend or girlfriend, school troubles, a wicked deed, etc. Nonetheless, they all have the same root — fear of loneliness, fear that you may find yourself in a situation when there is nobody that can understand, love and forgive you despite your faults and shortcomings.

Here it is important to affirm that everybody is a unique person who deserves to be loved; that life itself has value. There will never be another person exactly like you. Simply due to this point, you are worthy of being loved and respected. If you can believe and remember this, you will surely find a person who will love you—not for your beauty or your mathematical talents—but just for whom you are: a unique person.

Maybe today you are facing some problem: your school life is a mess, your parents are always scolding you or maybe they don't seem to care about you, or your best friend just betrayed you. Whatever. Everybody has moments of despair when life seems to consist only of misfortunes and suffering, when close and loving relationships seem to be part of the lives only of other, more fortunate people. If your life today appears to be dark and gloomy, the main thing is not to give way to despair

but to remember that eventually your situation will change. Believe that one day you will find love, friendship and understanding.

Many teenagers who make up their minds to commit suicide do it not because they want to die but because they do not see any way out of their miserable situation. We must be sensitive to the lives of those around us. The problems which seem insoluble to someone may not be as serious as they appear. If we are sensitive, a simple smile or a few sincere words may have the effect of saving a human life.

Religions on suicide

When we speak about helping people who want to kill themselves, we cannot avoid the religious perspective on the matter. All religions affirm that life is a precious gift given to us by God. Just as we did not choose to be born, neither do we have the right to take our own life. Our life is not just our own but has been entrusted to us for a purpose. We do not have the right to violate that trust. If we understand the preciousness of our life, then no matter how difficult our problems are, we will feel that no problem is worth the extinguishing of our life.

Another point to consider relates to the fact that a person usually decides to commit suicide as the 'final solution' to his or her problems. However, most religions teach that our existence continues after death. We do not leave our problems behind when we depart from the physical world. Life on earth is precious because this is the time when we are meant to grow spiritually and develop our ability to love in preparation for our life in the eternal world. If we deliberately deprive ourselves of this opportunity by ending our life prematurely, we are not solving our problems at all. On the contrary, we have added another one: eternal regret for the committed deed. (For more on life after death, see Chapter 7 of *My Journey in Life: A Student Textbook in Character Development*).



For Your Journal



Write a short essay on "Why suicide is no answer".

Imagine the situation where one of your friends has decided to commit suicide. How would you persuade him not to do it? How would you speak to him? What action would you take? What personal qualities should you have to be able to comfort and guide a suicidal friend? Who else would you turn to for help?

A Simple Story

Author Unknown

One day, when I was a freshman in high school, I saw a kid from my class walking home from school. His name was Kyle. It looked like he was carrying all of his books. I thought to myself, "Why would anyone bring home all his books on Friday? He must really be a nerd." I had quite a weekend planned (parties and a football game with my friends Saturday afternoon), so I shrugged my shoulders and went on.

As I was walking, I saw a bunch of kids running toward him. They ran at him, knocking all his books out of his arms and tripping him so he landed in the dirt. His glasses went flying, and I saw them land in the grass about ten feet from him. He looked up and I saw this terrible sadness in his eyes. My heart went out to him. So, I jogged over to him and as he crawled around looking for his glasses, I saw a tear in his eye. As I handed him his glasses, I said, "Those guys are jerks. They really should get lives." He looked at me and said, "Hey, thanks!" There was a big smile on his face. It was one of those smiles that showed real gratitude. I helped him pick up his books, and asked him where he lived. As it turned out he lived near me, so I asked him why I had never seen him before. He said he had gone to private school previously. I would have never hung out with a private school kid before.

We talked all the way home, and I carried his books. He turned out to be a pretty cool kid. I asked him if he wanted to play football on Saturday with my friends and me. He said yes. We hung out all weekend and the more I got to know him the more I liked him, and my friends thought the same of him.

Monday morning came, and there was Kyle with the huge stack of books again. I stopped him and said, "Boy, you're gonna really build up some serious muscles with this pile of books everyday!" He just laughed and handed me half the books.

Over the next four years, Kyle and I became best friends. When we were seniors, we began to think about college. Kyle decided on Georgetown, and I was going to Duke. I knew that we would always be friends, that the miles would never be a problem. He was going to be a doctor, and I was going for business on a football scholarship. Kyle was valedictorian of our class. I teased him all the time about being a nerd. He had to prepare a speech for graduation. I was so glad it wasn't me having to get up there and speak.

Graduation day came, and I saw Kyle. He looked great. He was one of those guys who really found himself during high school. He filled out and actually looked good in glasses. He had more dates than I had and all the girls loved him. Boy, sometimes was I jealous! I could see that he was nervous about his speech. So, I smacked him on the back and said, "Hey, big guy, you'll be great!" He looked at me with one of those looks (the really grateful one) and smiled. "Thanks," he said.

As he started his speech, he cleared his throat, and began. "Graduation is a time to thank those who helped you make it through those tough years. Your parents, your teachers, your siblings, maybe a coach, but mostly your friends. I am here to tell all of you that being a friend to someone is the best gift you can give them. I am going to tell you a story."

I just looked at him with disbelief as he told the story of the first day we met. He had planned to kill himself over the weekend. He talked of how he had cleaned out his locker so his Mom wouldn't have to do it later and was carrying all his stuff home. He looked hard at me and gave me a little smile. "Thankfully, I was saved. My friend saved me from doing the unspeakable." I heard the gasp go through the crowd as this handsome, popular boy told us all about his weakest moment. I saw his mom and dad looking at me and smiling that same grateful smile. Not until that moment did I realize its depth.

Never underestimate the power of your actions. With one small gesture you can change a person's life. For better or for worse, God puts us all in each other's lives to impact one another in some way.

Eleanor Roosevelt once wrote: "Many people will walk in and out of your life, but only true friends will leave footprints in your heart." Show your friend how much you care. You never know just how much of a difference it may make.