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A Buddhist View of Suicide

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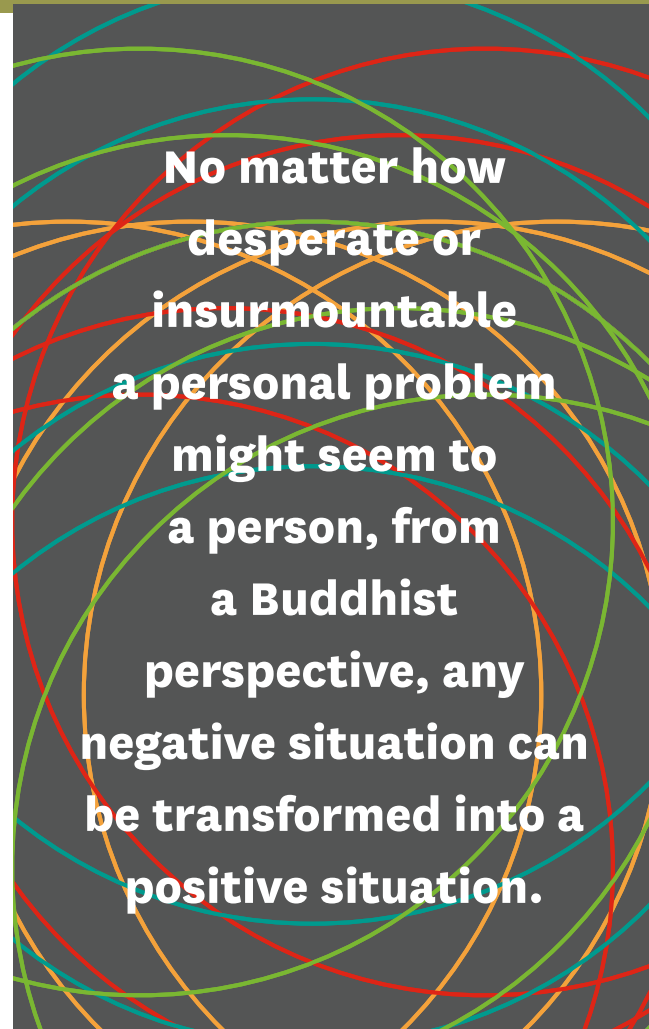
A Buddhist View of Suicide

One of the greatest tragedies is when a person takes their own life. How should we understand this tragedy from a Buddhist perspective?

First of all, life in Buddhism is looked at as a most noble, precious gift. We are born into this world amidst a myriad of causes and conditions, and if any of those conditions did not occur, we might not have been born. For example, we are the biological products of our parents, but what if parents did not meet, we would not have been born. Any number of circumstances could have prevented our parents from meeting. The same applies for our grandparents. We have four grandparents, and if they did not meet, our mother and father would not have been born, and then we would not have been born.

When we calculate just our parents, grandparents, great grandparents, and on down the line, in 10 generations there are over a thousand people directly responsible for our life. If we go back 20 generations, that number increases to over one million people!

To take this precious and noble life and to end it, is truly a great tragedy from a Buddhist perspective.



However, one cannot know the great suffering, anguish, or depression that might lead someone to take their own life. I know of a man who became a quadriplegic after a tragic car accident when he was in the prime of his life, in his early twenties. After his accident, he wanted to commit suicide, but being a quadriplegic, there was no way for him to take his own life. Fortunately, he encountered

the Buddha's teachings and his life was transformed from anguish and sorrow into a life of meaning and fulfillment.

The Buddha's teachings were intended for those who are lost, in suffering and sorrow. His teachings point to a way out of that suffering. For someone who is on the verge of suicide, for whatever reason, from a Buddhist perspective we would want to reach out to that person to help them find a path out of their suffering and sorrow, to find a solution to their problems other than suicide. No matter how desperate or insurmountable a personal problem might seem to a person, from a Buddhist perspective, any negative situation can be transformed into a positive situation.

Of course the solution is not easy. One must seek teachers and teachings. But you must never lose hope. Teachers and teachings are waiting for you. They are waiting for you to knock on their door, to call them on the phone, to send them a letter seeking their help. When you knock on that door, it will open, and the opportunity to turn your life around will begin.