

Chapter Thirty-six

SUICIDE

“And what is your secret motive, Mr. Quatermain? Nothing to live for?”

**Deborah Kerr to Stewart Granger in
the 1950 film *King Solomon’s Mines*.**

*“I think people who try to commit suicide, but fail in their first attempt,
give up much too easily.”*

Jerry Seinfeld



O Objective Consideration

It has occurred to me many times that life is over-rated. That is not morbid. One doesn't have to be writhing in the throes of physical or emotional pain in order to notice that death has a certain allure. There is a kind of attractiveness to it, you know? I can't help but be reminded of actor George Sanders' final comments before killing himself: "Dear World, I am leaving you because I am bored." I might put it differently: "Dear World, I am leaving you because I can't stand leaf blowers."

Consider not only the bright sun sweetly smiling, birds in the trees, and all the other things that make life a joy, but the horrific tortures and degradations people inflict upon each other. Consider the utter selfishness, the ugly greed for money, power, and prestige that most folks think of and celebrate as “life.” Consider the heartless sadism, the cold-hearted desecration of the earth, plants, and innocent animals.

Without human beings, we have paradise. With them — the Muslims, the Christians, the power-hungry politicians, priests, unscrupulous businessmen, and individual mean-spirited sadists — we human beings bring to life our pathogenic inner worlds, manifesting its mind-dreams in the hell on earth we create every day. The mass of humanity remains frightened, profoundly selfish, and for the most part corrupt, stupid, venal and vile. Why would anybody want to hang around all this stuff?

Instead of paying attention to the brightest, most beautiful and intelligent human beings who have given us their profound insights, guiding us out of madness into love, peace, sanity and beauty, we crucify them, ignore them, and go on pillaging, raping, and plundering each other and the planet. With TV and newspapers, there is no escape. Even with wealth, there is no escape. No question in my mind, so-called “life” has certain charms, but as I say, it is also considerably over-rated. There are times when I want out.

And who is to say that death is not better? How do we know? Nobody knows. So what is the fear? Either we die and it’s over, or we die and it’s not over. Either way, we’ll find out. How can we fear something we don’t know? For all we know, death is absolutely peaceful, simply a deep and timeless rest.

... .Alluring, no question about it. Absolute silence. Eternal security. No future, no anxiety. No past, no gnawing regrets. Peace. Silent night, all is calm, all is quiet. Squeeze the trigger. Done with it. Or, as George Sanders concluded in his note, “I have lived long enough. I am leaving you with your worries in this sweet cesspool — good luck.”

Personally, I like Oscar Wilde's last words on his deathbed, "Either that wallpaper goes, or I do."

Ha!

Ah, yes, once again Christmas dreams and fairytales are in the air. . . Here comes Santa Claus!

JK Thanatos Sang to Freud

. . . . Reason dictates restraint. Necessity tethers freeflight. And yet yearning for death has its beauteous wings, which you well understand. There's the attraction: the *possible* leap. How close can we come while remaining alert and alive on the edge? My death throes beckon. Thanatos sang to Freud. It sings to me, and always has. It sings to you every night, and always has. There's a gorgeous beauty when dark wings enfold the light. Music in the night holds the key.

Yearning. . . leaning. . . swooning. . . release. . .

Sweet, isn't it?

Read again slowly, like a song.

O If At First You Don't Succeed

I had to laugh out loud at that Seinfeld skit, where he said something like, I think people who try to commit suicide, but fail in their first attempt, give up much too easily. I mean, they give it a go, but it doesn't work, so they just toss it on top of the

pile along with everything else they couldn't do well. "See how worthless I am? I can't even kill myself."

I think they should persist, Jerry continued. If the old head-in-the-oven trick doesn't work, try sitting in the car with carbon monoxide. If that doesn't work, try hanging yourself in the closet. If that doesn't work, buy a gun or jump off a bridge.

I mean, really, you gotta make a sincere effort in these kinds of things. Persistence pays off!

SL You are not alone. Can You Be A Friend to Yourself?

My heart goes out to you. You are not alone.

There is not an intelligent person in the world who has not phantasized about suicide, some mildly, others intensely. We are, after all, the only species as far as we know that is aware of its own mortality. On the one hand, we normally fear the notion of death or dying. In fact, those who are most afraid of living, are most afraid of dying. Those who live deeply and intensely, with gusto, courage and creativity, fear death the least and die only once. They recognize that dying may not be such a bad idea. And why not choose one's own time, place and means? As well, there is not only *one* reason that gives rise to the thought of self-termination. There can be many. In your case, you are not upset about extreme age. You're not even 50 yet. Nor are you suffering from horrideous physical pain. You are not poor. But you *are* in a rage this week. I can't blame you.

As I say, you are not alone. I remember how I used to feel about the suicide scenario. As I suffered through it several times, I began to perceive that suicidal rage is a form of distorted love: it is distorted, because it is murder turned inward

toward one's self instead of outward toward another. This kind of rage is a rage against something or somebody or some situation that awakens a sense of powerlessness, a sense of impotence and frustration about being unable to change the situation. The rage and frustration made me gnash my teeth and get absolutely bombed (thereby beating myself up, instead of the one I was angry with). I would get loaded to the edge of self-immolation.

In fact, one time, drunk out of my mind, I intentionally stepped on the gas and drove my car head-on into *and through* the wall of somebody's garage. (After the noise quieted and the dust settled, I felt like a fool. Totaled the car, but all I had was a cut on my wrist. Then the cops came. . .blah, blah, blah. . . and here I am today — thankfully so, I might add.)

Whether directed outwardly at a perceived enemy or rival (such as a husband, boyfriend or girlfriend) or inwardly (toward one's self), the rage is caused by a fundamental *refusal to accept what is*. Do you agree? It's an utter denial of *the facts*. It's the thwarted ego throwing a massive two-year-old tantrum.

From experience, you already know it is a state of mind that will pass. If you allow yourself to bear the anger and frustration, bear the pain, and bear the suicidal fantasies long enough, it *will* pass. But of course, if one does not maintain composure and patience, but *acts on* the fantasy, one is then left with the consequences of whatever is done while carried away by fever-like mind-spinnings — in the most extreme case, a dead self; in lesser cases, a wrecked house, relationship, smashed car, or blood on the bathroom floor.

But almost as impossible as it may seem, even in the depths of anger, despair, and bleak hopelessness, *options do exist*. Suffocated in a black cloud of anger, it may not seem so, but they do. You do *not* have to be the victim of your own mind. You can *choose* what to think and how to think. It takes awareness, that is true, and it

takes a strong will to bear up under the mind's destructive thinking and the heart's fury. But it *can* be done. And *you* can do it.

The deepest hurt I ever felt was when the woman I loved left me because of my drinking. I refused to even try to stop, because I was *insisting* (to her, and to myself) that she accept me as I was. I wanted her to love me *my* way, not hers. And so she left.

I felt that agony you are feeling — that black hole screaming inside; that dangerous chasm pulling me toward it like a magnet; that rage that refused to accept the *reality* of the situation; the yearning for the end of pain, the end of my own thought processes, the end of every hurt, frustration, fury, heartbreak. I wanted to kill her. I wanted to hurt myself, just to feel the pain both emotionally and physically. In fact, I wanted to die.

You *know* I know how you feel. And so I hold my hand out to you.

Boredom and numbness is part of it, isn't it? At a certain point, the pain searing the soul is just too much to bear. Everything becomes dull, deep grey, and meaningless. One's critical nature arises, condemning not only one's self in every contemptuous way, but all others as well — their interests seems trivial and stupid; their smiles seem shallow; their conversation is utterly puerile; their concerns are petty, empty, stupid. Everything, in fact, is a tedious and annoying distraction that only adds to one's misery.

When the heart weeps like this, there is only one thing that helps: it is a combination of compassion for one's self and one's agony, mixed with patience, time, and the knowledge that every day changes the situation and one's feelings at least a little bit, sometimes a lot — and always for the better. But only if one gives compassion, patience and time a chance.

As you probably see, the misery, frustration, isolation and loneliness that you feel today tap directly into the alienation and little-girl-lost loneliness you felt as a child hurting yourself out of anger, fury, and that deep unmet desperate need for love. Today's anger awakens in full fury those deep-seated pains inflicted upon you by your hopelessly dysfunctional alcoholic parents. The pain in the present with your friend immediately brings about an eruption of ancient childhood hurts, and everything in your mind gets all mixed together, tossed up and down and topsy-turvy. It's a hard burden to bear. But you *can* bear it, especially if you sort it out and see it clearly.

When your mind gets to reeling next time, catch it in the act. Step back from it. Watch it. Watch the way it moves and works itself into deeper anger and pain. Watch how it wants to keep taking you over. As you watch, take slow, deep breaths. Notice how you feel better. Teach yourself how to do this whenever you catch your mind taking you off and away into its own mind. In other words: remember. Remember yourself. Remember to *wake up*. Pay attention. *Watch, Listen, Know*.

Do *not* take self-destructive action now. Do *not* brutalize yourself out of tearful frustration and do *not* take that "one last walk" across the field on a freezing night, carrying only a bottle of booze and the pills you mentioned.

You can always do that later. But not *now*, because you are not working with the fullness of who you are. Your thinking and feelings at this moment are lop-sided, partial, and out of balance. Do you agree?

How long is life? How long is death? Pain passes. Dead is forever.

Remember Angelina Jolie's song? — "*Razors pain you, rivers are damp, acid stains you, drugs cause cramps, guns aren't lawful, nooses give, gas smells awful — you might as well live.*"

Kinda cool, eh?

And please do not beat yourself up with guilt or contempt. There is no "wicked monster" inside yourself. The rage you feel is totally understandable. Are you supposed to be "above" human feeling? Will self-condemnation help? Or will it only add to the pain (which can indeed feel "good," but which does not in fact help the situation. Am I right?). Why call yourself a monster, pathetic, vicious, etc.?

How about acknowledging your hurt, your pain, your anger, your frustration, your vindictiveness — and using it as *an opportunity for awareness*. Step back, *see* how your mind has a mind of its own, give yourself deep love, deep compassion, and deep kindness, exactly the way you surely would to a sweet wounded puppy or pussycat or friend.

Can you be a friend to yourself in this time of sorrow?

Write to me. Express yourself, even as you have in your recent e-mail. Your thoughts and words and feelings need release. You are not "whining" and you are not a "monster." Since I am the only one to whom you speak about these matters, then take full advantage of the situation. Why not?

I would offer only one cautionary suggestion: Do *not* drink yourself into a blackout, especially with other people around during the Holiday season, and do not act on

your fantasy of ultimate relief. Whenever I get intense about suicide, I resolve to do it, yes, but not today. Tomorrow, for sure, *but not today*.

A lot of things should be examined, do you agree? I guess I'm saying that *a suicidal whim is not something to be indulged*. A great deal of quiet, calm, extended thought should go into it. No jumping off a 200-foot bridge, only to suddenly change your mind ten feet down. *I mean calm consideration, extended over a long period of time*. Close observation of one's shifting thoughts, feelings, moods, and modes of coping with daily life.

Trust my words. Re-read them, if you would. Give them a chance to help you navigate through the dark woodland of your mind's turmoil to the other side. There is another side, you know. New light beckons.

And if music helps, let it into your heart and let it ease your pain, my music, yes, but also anybody else who can touch your heart, too — from me, to Jeff and/or Tim, to Kris, to Elgar, to Chopin. In the darkest depths, music can be your dearest friend.

Give my loving words a chance. Give music a chance. Give yourself a chance.

The moment you feel like writing to me, sit down instantly and do it, yes?

I am here for you. I am with you.

We're as close as our eyes on the screen and our fingertips touching keyboards.

O **The Note**

I have no idea why they call it a “note,” instead of a *letter* to those who remain behind. And why, so often, do those who actually pull the trigger or walk into the ocean fail to leave any explanation to their loved ones? Really bad manners, don’t you think? Not to mention egregiously narcissistic.

I would not want Sonia or anybody else who cares for me to feel as if *they* were the cause. Sonia makes me tremendously happy with myself and the life we share. It’s a joy being with her, even when she gets cranky once in a while. She’s a kind, loving person who saved my life, like the angel she is, and has made our life together into a song. Never would I want her to feel responsible if I choose to step out of this vale of tears called “the world.”

Surely, just about everybody who has courage enough, nobility enough, and sense enough to rationally decide for themselves when and where to depart this life would and should remember to leave a farewell letter, emphasizing the love s/he feels for those who care for them, letting them know they are not to “blame,” and, indeed, that perhaps “blame” reveals a lack of insight into the positive reasons why one might want to end it all. I sure as heck don’t want to cling desperately my life through all sorts of physical pain, emotional anxiety, and systemic dissolution.

I don’t care what they call it — a note, a letter, final words — just leave it for those who care, that’s all. It’s the next-to-the-last last act of compassion one can have. The last is doing the deed itself, don’t you agree?

GS Mental Suicide, Physical Suicide, and Enlightenment

What a great question! — “I am somewhat confused as to what the difference is between ‘mental suicide’ and ‘enlightenment.’ Surely, mental suicide is the better

option to actual suicide. Let me quickly say, I am in NO way inclined to waste my gift of life when less fortunate people are clinging on for dear hope. Life is too good to miss. But the T.E. Lawrence episode and the ‘mind suicide’ mentioned by Colin Wilson got me to thinking. There must be a third way. Is there?”

When you speak of ‘mind suicide’ and the great T.E. Lawrence in the same breath, it’s good to be careful. Lawrence’s brilliant mind gave him penetrating insight into other peoples’ character and motivations, which helped him see through the state of laziness, corruption and deceit that most people live in every day. On the one hand, that penetrating perception nauseated him, because he saw how childish, self-centered, brutal, violent, stupid, and dangerous some people are. On the other hand, it enabled him to see clearly into his associates and become their leader.

That same power of observation and discernment also served as an insurmountable barrier. Lawrence remained entrapped in his “thought-riddled” nature, with the exception of various “peak” moments (such as seeing the clear dawn that beautiful morning, “not filtered through or made typical by thought”). He felt painfully alienated from human beings and from life itself. For the most part, his extraordinary mind prevented him from connecting directly with his own deep, complex feelings, and with nature and other people. When his experiences in World War I broke him — too much killing, too much lying, and the horrific way in which the British government exploited and betrayed him and the Arabs — he more or less gave up living. He committed “mind-suicide” by escaping into anonymity, pretty much dropping out of life entirely. His body kept on living, of course, but his mind and soul went dead. In a profound sense, there was nobody home anymore.

There is a vast difference between the defeat and mind-suicide a broken man suffers and the enlightenment that the Dalai Lama, Osho, Krishnamurti and others talk about. Their enlightenment cracks through the egoic mind's many obstacles, traps, barriers, and distortions, and soars up and beyond the conditioned mind, into bliss.

That transcendence of mind, that breakthrough into supraconsciousness, is often analogously compared to "suicide," or to "death." But a metaphor is only a metaphor — a linguistic figure of speech pointing to a certain other kind of reality. They are not talking about physical death, or about the mind's "shorting out," so to speak. They are talking about a "death" of the ego, a transcendence of mind, and an awakening *into* Higher Consciousness, Unity Consciousness, Cosmic Consciousness, whatever we wish to call it.

When the mental-egoic personal self "dies," one is reborn into transpersonal consciousness while retaining the ability to access all prior lower levels at will. That is important to remember. You do not lose anything through this kind of psycho-spiritual evolutionary development. You don't "kill" ego or anything else. In Ken Wilber's terms, you include the healthy aspects of each level, even as you transcend it and enter the next higher level, moving from childhood pre-egoic (narcissistic) consciousness, to egoic strength and health, ascending on up to Unity Consciousness.

You can't skip steps, either. Substances such as LSD, ecstasy, or alcohol sometimes offer glimpses into higher stages; but you come back down to your original position *and have to grow through* each stage, up into the next higher level. You can build on them. But permanent development takes place only one step at a time. The first step

involves understanding how the human mind in general works — your own mind in particular.

T.E. Lawrence got stuck at the egoic level, and was psychologically unhealthy as well. His psychological problems caused him to live a lie — he was a masochistic homosexual who lived a secret life of which he felt ashamed. That drained energy. And when the war broke his incredibly strong will, he had no energy left, none at all. He stopped growing. The strain of his personal life, his neurotic needs, the inner separation between his authentic being and his public persona, the killing, and the deceptions of the war — all of these things left him broken. Hence, the “mind suicide” of dropping out of public life and disappearing into the RAF and anonymity. He needed out. He needed rest. He needed to get away from the pain of everything he had known before.

Physical suicide is always an option for anybody, of course. And it really doesn't matter whether others value their lives or not. Suicide is purely personal. If one is angry and depressed and no longer values his life, then he thinks of suicide. If the pain is too much; if the refusal to accept unwelcome facts is adamant; if the resistance and rage and resultant depression become overwhelming, then of course that rage (and its ally, despair) can lead one to an irrevocable decision.

When one is dead, pain leaves, of course, but so do life, consciousness, and options. The thing about the suicidal mind-state is that it casts a very strong spell. It is a fantasy that seems irresistibly real. One simply *cannot* remember, that as long as one is alive, there are *always* options. If one does not allow another point of view in — a lover's, a friend's, a therapist's, whomever — then one might take that irrevocable step. Personally, I'd hate to pull the trigger and change my mind in the

instant just before I heard the shot go off.

Both of these “suicides” are very different from the mind-transcendence the mystics speak of as a developmental stage between the mental-egoic level and Higher-Consciousness. T.E. Lawrence lived in mental hell. Mystics live in no-mind bliss. For the mystics, even with their normal human problems, life and consciousness remain a joy. The mystic’s way is the third way you speak of.

To get there, you have to come to know and understand yourself, to know who you are. That’s why Colin Wilson says in *The Outsider* at the end of the first section of Chapter Four, just before moving into the T.E. Lawrence section, “*these men did not understand themselves, and consequently wasted their powers. . . . The Outsider’s first business is self-knowledge.*” Without self-knowledge, one remains inert, uncreative, just pissing and dreaming life away. With it, one can get off one’s duff, start putting those dreams of creativity into action, and start taking healthy risks in work, love, and life.

I hope all is going well for you, G. As you continue on the path, one step at a time, not rushing or trying to skip over necessary steps, you will solve problems and unravel complexities, eventually creating a solid foundation that will give you a sense of security and direction.

All the best until next time,

L

O

Peter Pan At 70

At twenty-one, I started losing my magnificent shock of hair, and now am virtually bald. I have learned to love and appreciate hats.

Had my teeth painlessly removed a few years ago. Installed titanium implants, upon which I clamp the lower and upper plates. Hello. Can nosh on corn-on-the-cob or apples or steak or bagels. And since I have no teeth, I have no bad breath. The teeth look good, too, not that it matters. Don't see a lot of 24-year-old summergirls winking at me any more.

A couple of years ago, had my cataracts removed and new lenses installed directly *inside* the pupils. Voila — new eyes! Of course, I still can't see everything at every distance, so I need glasses to read subtitles on foreign movies, and glasses to read even these very words I am writing.

Got a prescription for Cialis, and now my wife and I enjoy each others' company better than ever. Glass of wine, a toke or two, a little hypnotrantic electronic music, a stiffer hard enough to do chin-ups on, oh, yes, so good — and for so long! Wish Vitamin C had been around when I was 19 about a century ago. Sex was good then. It's a thousand times better now. Sonia swears that the meaning of life is sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll. I agree absolutely.

Recently discovered that my lungs are going — asthma, eventually emphysema.

Am sucking on Advair twice a day and still feel tight in the chest. Hmmm. Then, just last week, found out I have high blood pressure. Hypertension. Not just tension, but *hypertension*. Up there around 180 over 93. That makes it special, like some kind of a medal.

I suppose I could get a lung transplant. What with new teeth, new eyes, and new lungs, I could strut around as Peter Pan at 70 — The Authentic Bionic Man. And there are all kinds of druggie-wugs that lower blood pressure. Maybe there's one that will lower blood pressure and get me high, too.

But why? What's the point? Eternal duration?

My neighbor, who is six years older and has Parkinson's, said that as soon as things like this start, they just get worse.

Where did I hide that gun? Damn.

Memory's shot, too. Ah, well.

Plenty of time.

As Hermann Hesse wrote in *Steppenwolf*, "Eternity is a mere moment, just long enough for a joke."

And I love George Carlin's line, "Death is caused by swallowing small amounts of saliva over a long period of time."

Keep on keepin' on, old friend.

I am with you always,

Lee