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Practical spirituality can put a stop to suicide

By Elise L. Moore

Hopelessness and depression are reportedly major causes of suicide around the world. Sadly, more than a million people commit suicide annually.

The statistics are chilling. The worldwide rate is 16 suicides per 100,000 people. In the last 45 years, suicide rates have increased 60 percent, according to the World Health Organization. A study published in *The Lancet*, a British medical journal, reported that the average rate of -suicide for women in southern India was a shocking 148 per 100,000, with 58 per 100,000 for men. China, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka also have disclosed alarmingly high rates of suicide among women.

In Russia and Eastern Europe, the rate for men is significantly higher than for women. In Lithuania, more than 80 men per 100,000 committed suicide. The Russian Federation reported 70 men and 12 women per 100,000 in 2000. While alcohol is considered a contributing factor in these regions, general hopelessness and economic frustration have played a part.

In the United States, suicide is the third leading cause of death of young people between the ages of 10 and 24. Males are four to six times more at risk than young women.

Regardless of demographics, hope can rise at any moment in the human heart. Because of this, there is nothing inevitable about suicide. Hope is an expectancy of good. It's a feeling that one has the means to fulfill a treasured desire. Young people might feel that their destiny has been decided by others -- for example, school authorities, parents, employers. It might seem that chance has clipped the wings of their dreams. Life might look predetermined, with hopes and dreams for happiness forever lost.

But "with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26). Regardless of circumstances, good is possible with God. In the midst of darkness, the divine

light is shining hope into the human heart. It's the light of the Christ that gently leads one out of despair and into renewed hope that good can and will happen.

In Mary Baker Eddy's words, Christ is "the divine message from God to men speaking to the human consciousness" (Science and Health, p. 332). Christ is God's gift to humanity. It's not limited to one race or culture, age or denomination. The divine message brings safety, salvation, and hope to each individual.

There are stories in the Bible of this Christ-light coming to people even before the advent of Jesus. For example, the children of Israel were led through the wilderness by a pillar of fire at night. Wasn't this the divine light leading an entire race from hopelessness and slavery into hope and freedom? That doesn't mean there were no challenges in their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land and afterward. But the spiritual demands they faced in the wilderness, while onerous at first, became empowering later. The spiritual strengthening that went on in the wilderness gradually took away their intense focus on themselves, their actions, their comforts, and so on. The daily presence of God -- as illustrated by the provision of manna and quail for them to eat and Moses' daily communion with Deity -- began to make an impression, to transform thought and instill a sense of belonging to God.

In the Western world, men might feel burdened by failure, but there's also evidence that feelings of isolation, of not belonging--especially if they are reinforced by cliques that make a point of mocking "outsiders"--can be harmful. Believing that they don't measure up to their own or others' expectations, they jump to wrong conclusions. Persistent love from family and friends, and alertness to changes in behavior, are invaluable. Steady prayer for inspiration in knowing how to help an individual contemplating suicide is essential.

Patience and gratitude can restore hope. One approach that has helped many people who are tempted by suicide is to think of one good experience in their lives, however small, and then another and then another-and to affirm with each one that this is evidence of omnipotent goodness, present *right now*. This will turn their thoughts in the right direction. Friends can encourage this approach at times when an individual is struggling. Being grateful for little things will prepare a person to see bigger blessings--and "to-day is big with blessings" (Science and Health, p. vii).

Gratitude strengthens and supports patience. To patiently wait for good to happen isn't "doing nothing;" if one is affirming his or her spirituality and inseparable relation to God--even in the face of discouragement. Patience as expressed in this passage from one of the Apostle Paul's letters can save an individual from bolting just before a blessing arrives: "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

In the Eastern world, women are sometimes forced to submit to inhumane and harsh lives. Some apparent suicides may actually be murders. Either way, the more we value each individual and recognize her place as the child of an all-loving God, the more our prayer can help break women's bondage.

Even when hardship is grinding a person into submission, the fact remains that there is a law of good operating in everyone's life. God knows the good that you are doing. God sees all the good that is in you, and God sees all the good that you are capable of doing. Prayerful affirmation of God's law of good gives wings to the struggling heart.

In some parts of the world, women are thought of as meant to do manual labor while men do all the thinking. This attitude doesn't bless either gender, because it rejects the spiritual origin of all people. Women are valuable but not merely as sexual partners or workers. Women are creative, intelligent ideas. Praying for women to express wisdom and courage can help sustain them under severe trials.

Wisdom is practical spirituality. Women reflect the divine wisdom that comes from the divine Mind. Spiritual intuitions have the power to keep them safe. Our simple affirming that courage is a God-given quality can help women discover and feel the inner strength that is already theirs.

In our prayers for people, whether male or female, Eastern or Western, this passage from Science and Health can be helpful: "The metaphysician, making Mind his basis of operation irrespective of matter and regarding the truth and harmony of being as superior to error and discord, has rendered himself strong, instead of weak, to cope with the case; and he proportionately strengthens his patient with the stimulus of courage and conscious power. Both Science and consciousness are now at work in the economy of being according to the law of Mind, which ultimately asserts its absolute supremacy" (p. 423).

Gratitude, patience, wisdom, courage--they can spark the hope that is needed to stop suicide. Life is spontaneous and full of unexpected blessings. The next thought can be the saving one. The next person can be the helpful one. Never underestimate the power of good operating in your life and in others' lives.

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