

A Letter to Someone Whose Son Committed Suicide

One of Ven. Chodron's students wrote her about the unexpected and tragic suicide of his son who had suffered from schizophrenia for several years. In one letter he asked for advice on what can be done to counter the feelings of sadness, loss, self-doubt and guilt he experienced due to his son's death. (The names have been changed in the letter.)

Dear George,

The last few days have probably been very busy for you and you have probably been feeling shocked and in a daze. You'll have more time now to slow down and let your mind settle, as well as to feel and then let go of various emotions. It's important to maintain your practice now. Do the Chenrezig practice and send out healing rays of light from Chenrezig's heart to Bill, to all beings who suffer from schizophrenia, to all beings who suffer. Imagine Chenrezig's compassion heals their misery and transforms their minds to that they now practice the Dharma, generate the three principal aspects of the path, and attain enlightenment.

Yes, Bill did bring some negative karma into this life from a previous one, and that led to his suffering. Let's hope that that karma has finished now so that his future lives will be better. Bill also experienced the result of some good karma as well. He had two loving parents who provided everything he could have possibly wanted or needed. He had a loving sister, brother-in-law and niece. He lived in a peaceful society. He had an education as well as food, clothing, shelter and medicine aplenty.

Feeling sadness and loss is a natural reaction to a change that you neither expected nor desired. Grieving is the process of adapting to this change. Be glad that Bill was in your life for as long as he was. We cannot hold on to anyone forever—we cannot hold onto even our own body and this life's identity forever. Send Bill on with a lot of love, dedicating for him to be born in the pure land or to have a precious human life; to realize the determination to be free, bodhicitta, and the correct view of reality; to meet fully qualified Mahayana teachers and to practice under their guidance with faith and understanding; and to quickly become a Buddha so that he'll be able to work for the well-being of all sentient beings. Imagine Bill having a fortunate and happy life, with a clear mind and a kind heart. Dedicate so that through your Dharma practice in this life, when you meet his future continuity in the future, you will be able to benefit him by sharing the Buddha's teachings with him. Dedicate so that you have a good Dharma relationship with him in all future lives.

Self-doubt and guilt are ego's making waves. Don't feed those thoughts, because they are erroneous and will impede your ability to practice Dharma and to generate bodhicitta. You and your wife did everything you possibly could—and even more—for Bill. You gave him his body, raised him with love, gave him a good education,

taught him so much, and so on. From your side, you gave to him with a good motivation, sincerely wishing that he would be happy. But you could not control the ripening of his karma. Even the Buddha could not control the ripening of Bill's karma, although the Buddha's wish for Bill to be happy and his compassion for Bill is so great. When you do the mandala offering, put Bill in it and offer him to the Buddha, and think that now he is under the Buddha's care so that you don't need to worry. Then take all the love you feel for him and share it with all sentient beings, especially those you meet as you go live each day.