

AN IMPOSSIBLE ROAD TO FREEDOM

by Lee Moses

Robin Williams' suicide has caused quite a stir and outpouring of sympathy this past week. Many lament the loss of such a genius. His penchant for crudeness aside, he was certainly a talented and creative comic and actor. And his longstanding celebrity and perpetual good humor made his suicide all the more shocking. One can understand that at times like this, people would try to put the best spin on things, to try to find comfort and make sense out of an evidently senseless event. However, not all the comfort and sense-making has been truly comforting or sensible, because it has not been true.

For example, consider the following Internet post, posted on social media by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences (commonly known as "The Academy," the group known for the Academy Awards/Oscars):



This post was widely viewed and "favorited" by hundreds of thousands. The post derives from the film *Aladdin*, in which Robin Williams performed the voice of the Genie. At the conclusion of the film, Aladdin has a wish to make, and instead of wishing something for himself, he wishes for the Genie to be free, thus liberating the Genie from his centuries-old bondage to a lamp and its owner. By applying the emancipative utterance "Genie, you're free" to Williams' suicide, the implication is that suicide provided Williams the desired release from his struggles with addiction and depression.

This is an irresponsible suggestion. Others could easily but falsely reason, "If suicide made Robin Williams free from his problems, why can't it make me free from mine?" "Copycat suicide" is a well-documented phenomenon. As Christine Moutier, chief medical officer for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, said, "Suicide should never be presented as an option. That's a formula for potential contagion."

And suicide is not a viable option—not ever. It can never lead to freedom. Self-murder is still murder, and as such brings condemnation (Gal. 5:21). It mocks God's right to give and take human life (Eccl. 12:7; Jas. 4:14). Suicide is surrender, and is a coward's way out. It is selfish, in that it takes no consideration of loved ones left behind, who will have to endure the remainder of their lives haunted by the nightmare their loved one left behind. Or suicide can be so selfish that it **does** take consideration of loved ones left behind, deliberately calculated to inflict the greatest degree of pain possible upon them.

This is not to suggest that those contemplating suicide are not facing significant problems. This is not to suggest that some people are not in serious need of help, because they are. And we should be on the lookout for warning signs, ready to provide gentle encouragement to those so desperately in need of compassion. But suicide should never be held up as praiseworthy, or as a road to freedom. That is a destination to which suicide can never bring anyone.