



# Is Suicide a Crisis or an Opportunity of the End of Suffering from Buddhist Perspective?

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## Abstract

Suicide is a problem that is present in every society at every level. It has become an increasing behavior that is imitated and acceptable, appearing on various social media. To a large degree in contemporary society in particular, the rate of suicide attempts is quickly escalating. This is caused by many social factors of many kinds, such as family problems; economic problems; problems in love relationships; problems in a society that is disoriented, chaotic, competitive and lacking in sincerity; face-saving problems when with a debt burden at work, the problem of suffering from a disease that makes one not want to live anymore, and other problems not mentioned here that constitute conditions giving rise to attempted suicide. If one believes in the circle of death and birth, suicide addresses the problem at only that moment, but as for the future, it will still be a problem that one cannot avoid, as it was merely passed by in evasion. When the real cause is not properly extinguished, even more problems within society will arise. So, the right way of ending such problems is to give yourself the opportunity to have life in order to create good things to yourself and society and in order to cultivate cognitive wisdom in the mind which leads to the complete end of problems.

*Keywords:* Suicide, End of Suffering, Buddhist Perspective.

## Introduction

In era when online social media influences the daily lives of people, many are only interested in new technology. Always on the phone screen, computer monitor communicating through various online applications, they neglect communicating well by talking to each other face to face. They miss opportunities to discuss issues or share various stories -- and the chance to understand each other. Everyone is merely interested in his or her own story. Such behavior results in changes within family and social life. This leads to different problems especially that of suicide, found in contemporary society. Suicide or 'Attavinip ta' means putting down one's life or destroying one's life oneself. A person who puts down one's life has the readiness to die by resolving decisively to die and to bring it about on oneself, for instance, through shooting, hanging, drinking poison, jumping off a building, and so on.

Presently, there is increasing evidence on suicide that the Internet and social media can influence suicide-related behavior. Important questions are whether this influence poses a significant risk to the public and how public health approaches might be used to address the issue. One can always find this problem in daily news reports. So, the problem of losing one's life from self-harm is not far away anymore. It can happen to both genders and all ages in society. Contemporary styles of maintaining life in societies contribute to stress, such as rivalries within workplace environments, or high pressure and competition faced at school. Besides these, there is also the stress of suffering caused by sickness from various ailments. All of these are the stimulants that make people have more stress.

If any member of the society is in society whose resistance to these problems or to problematic situation is not adequate, there may be risk of committing suicide. So, the tendency of suicide in Thai society is often caused by stress and the state of mind that is feeble and unsatisfied. In particular, the social environment that is changing in a rapid and complex manner give rise to a lot of adjustment problems. It is evident that Thai society is becoming more violent. For instance, there is violence within families or violence against others caused by uncontrollable emotions, or the problems of people in society caused by oppression or stress, causing mental health problems such as aggression or depression. There is suffering from the problems of life but one cannot solve them or find a way out by thinking that suicide will help them quickly be delivered from suffering.

The author of this article aims to propose the idea that if examined according to Buddhist perspective, suicide in order to escape the problem is a real chance to make one go beyond suffering, or moving forward toward the crisis of life.

## What's Behind Suicide?

A thought that needs to commit suicide of people mostly comes from a cause in which people could not find the way (misunderstanding) escape the problems of life. Thus, they are sure that suicide is only the way to end problems. Committing suicide extends to all walks of life in Thai society. Be it a star, singer, actor, businessman, student, especially the news of suicide that often happen to those who are officials and armed person, before committing suicide often seen killing commander as well as the person around him/her or the person who has a scandal before. If considered the number of a loss of life, it would be enormous. This does not include economic losses and investment in the public sector, education and other. Therefore, the problem of suicide, which is often overlooked as a small problem, should be reviewed and helped to eliminate these problems to mitigate the cause of suicide. Many causes of suicide are found:

1. Cause of Illness: Mostly a patient commits suicide in order to stop suffering from severely physical illness, which is no way to heal but always suffer from being disease.
2. Cause of mental and emotional illness, such as anger, jealousy, complex depression, stress problems, financial problems, obligations and liabilities, loss of reputation, honor, money and so on, death is chosen as the last solution of life.
3. Cause of faith and wrong belief, such as the awakening of the end of the world, people persuade each other committing suicide, or in some belief, there is a doctrine involving in the belief of suicide in order to achieve the ultimate goal of the doctrine.<sup>1</sup>

Suicide caused a lot of impact on themselves as well as their families, friends, relatives, social and also economic impact. On September 10, 2006, it was recorded as the first campaign in Thailand in order to prevent suicide as universal day in over the world. Although reported suicide rates in Thailand tend to decrease continuously when compared to other countries. It seems that Thailand has fewer problems, but the information to consider together is the number of people who attempted suicide or might call who ever try to do, but not succeed. According to the Department of Mental Health, the Ministry of Public Health found that the number of Thais who attempt to suicide in average was more than those who succeed suicide for 5 times. Thus the problem of suicide is not a small problem. Both the government and the concerned agencies have to actively campaign

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<sup>1</sup>Thansetthakij (Thai), **Suicide: Silent Disaster in Thai Society**, visited on October 9, 2013. [www.cps.chula.ac.th/library/popupdate/?p=22](http://www.cps.chula.ac.th/library/popupdate/?p=22).

to prevent suicide seriously and continuously. In addition, to calculate the economic loss from suicide in Thailand by which calculation from the average working age remaining to retirement and the average earning income to the retirement age, it found that in 2005, Thailand lost its human resources because suicide was a loss of economy about 16 million Thai baht. The above cost does not include the other social impacts that follow as well. When it combined, will inevitably amplify the effect of a lot of damage. Due to the impact of suicide influence a wide and deep impact on society in which cannot estimate as in the case of economic impact.

## Components of Successful Killing

Now come to an analysis of the term “*Pāṇātipāta*” and “*Attavinipāta*”, both have the different meanings. “*Pāṇātipāta*” is destroying life of other sentient beings, making other life shortage before the expectancy life, taking away the right to live from him/her. The term “*Attavinipāta*” means committing suicide; self-killing, causing karma terminates before the life expectancy. “*Pāṇātipāta*” derives from two words, ‘*Pāṇa*’ and ‘*Atipāta*’, word ‘*Pāṇa*’ by conventional meaning is sentient beings (except one’s self), by mean of ultimate truth stands for material quality of life and psychic life. Meanwhile word ‘*Atipāta*’ means to fall away. Together is to make sentient being’s life fall away in which means to make sentient beings dies before their expectancy age.<sup>2</sup> Term “*Attavinipāta*” also comes from two combinations, ‘*Atta*’ and ‘*Vinipāta*’. Word ‘*Atta*’ represents to one’s self, one’s life (not include other life), meanwhile ‘*Vinipāta*’ stand for to fall away, to fall life away. Two combinations mean falling one’s life away, killing oneself before a proper age.

Let’s consider the components of killing. Being harmful other life and one’s life are subject to be heavy kamma, to be *Akusalakammapada* or not depend upon components. Both type of killing is accessible to either *Akusalakammapada* or not accessible to, if it accesses to *kammapada* (heavy fruit of evil action); that action is considered as *janakakamma* will be able to be born in *apayabhumi* (four woeful realms), if not, being reborn in such world is uncertain, it results only in present day that make his/her to experience miserable life. The action will access to *kammapada* or not, it must consist of the following components of action.

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<sup>2</sup>Wannasitthi Waitayasewe, (Thai), **Manual of Abhidhammatthasamgaha**, Vol. 5, Vithimut-tasamgahavibhaga, (Bangkok: Nabmahaniranon Foundation, 2548), P.202-205.

1. Pāno:	Sentient beings
2. Pānasa—it:	Knowing sentient beings
3. Vadhakacittam:	Thought to kill (to death)
4. Payogo:	Attempt to kill (to death)
5. Tena maranam:	Death with such attempt

These all five parts are completely combined together the action of evil will take an effect to be “*Kammapada*” ‘the heavy consequent’, if not, just yields an effect in present day. Furthermore, it will be considered as heavy or light result depends on the destructed person whether he or she is the noble one as well.

## The Buddhist View on Suicide

According to Buddhist point of view, human will be good or bad depend on him/herself. The ability of human beings to control themselves as what they want shows the owner of life. As the owner of life, he or she has the right in that life.<sup>3</sup> Such right may be classified in two main parts: The right to live and the right to die. Even Buddhism say that suicide is not wholesome, not the right way to solve the problem of life, just only escape from one state to another, this solution of life problem is just the way of a crazy man, not a wise man. But Buddhism does not condemn those who commit suicide. In the Vinaya, even there is consideration to punish the monk who tried to commit suicide but that action is just a ‘*tukkata*’ (light offence), and the offense does not come from the cause of suicide, but for other reasons, suicide is another way that can harm others. And a person who commits suicide does not break the first precept (*Pāṇātipāta* = killing sentient beings) because the first precept is subject to kill other life, not to one’s life.<sup>4</sup> For monk discipline, suicide is also not considered as breaking the third Vinaya rule, because the Buddha has laid down this third one focusing on killing only human beings (*Manussaviggaha*), not to one’s life.<sup>5</sup>

In the Commentary of the Vinaya Pitaka, the commentators expounded that the monks who committed suicide and the monks who told others to kill him were not

<sup>3</sup> Somphan Phromtha, (Thai), **Buddhism and Ethic Problem:** View Point of Buddhism on the Problem of Courtesan, Abortion and Mercy Killing, (Bangkok: Buddhajata Press, 2435), P. 142.

<sup>4</sup> **Vin.** (Thai) 1/213/201.

<sup>5</sup> **Vin.** (Thai) 1/176-179/146-149.

considered as breaking the third rule of *Parājika*.<sup>6</sup> In addition, it should note that when the Buddha known a monk who has committed suicide, blamed this action which was not suitable behavior to monk.<sup>7</sup>

In the Suttanta Pitaka, it mentions to a number of monk, who attained the arahanoot while they were seriously ill, had much suffering, and attempted to commit suicide. At the time of suicide, they considered suffering with wisdom, seen the truth of life, then did not attach to the body, in a split second before dying they finally got enlightened. To make clear picture on this matter let's see the story of Venerable Chana as example, it is said that: Venerable Chana did not feel well, would not survive. He got unpleasant feeling severely and increasingly. He could not stop much suffering, he wants to end all problem, so he finally decided to take a weapon and put an end to his life. Venerable Sariputta approached the Buddha and asked Him on what is Chana life after death. The Buddha said “Sariputta, there may be the families of venerable Channa’s friends, well-wishers and earlier relatives, I say, there is no fault to that extent. Sariputta, if someone gives up this body and seizes another, I say it is a fault. In the bhikkhu Channa that fault is not apparent. Bhikkhu Channa took his life faultlessly.”<sup>8</sup>

As example case mentioned above, Venerable Chana at the time of suicide considered suffering with wisdom, seen the truth of life, then did not attach to the body, in a split second before dying they finally got enlightened. Even though most patients are unable to do so, but there are quite a few who can live with pain without being miserable. It because of mind associates with mindfulness and concentration, do not let mind attaches to pain, seeing thing with wisdom as it really is, not relegated painfulness causes only body pain, but not mind.

However, even suicide does not violate the first precept for lay man and does not *Parājika* for a monk, because it does not complete the components of killing and is not called *Kammapada* (not heavily kamma). But it should be considered that any action in which one intends to end the life of whether one’s life or others, that act is considered as unwholesome, causing to be reborn in woeful planes. When he or she was reborn in human

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<sup>6</sup>Vin.A. (Thai) 2/359.

<sup>7</sup>Vin. (Thai) 1/179/149.

<sup>8</sup>I.B. Horner, **The Middle Length Sayings**, Vol. III, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsi Dass Publishers Private Limited, 2004), pp. 315-319.

life, it causes their life full of sufferings.<sup>9</sup> Because the more or less ordinary person does such a thing, there must come from bad consciousness, such as anger or desire, to get away from the status quo etc. Although the offender is well intentioned at the beginning, but immediately intended to destroy life or end the life. The psycho-psyche is instantaneous, so no matter who suicide is a monk or a human being it is considered to do unwholesome act. Buddhism taught that life is valuable. As long as we still have breathing, even in illness, can also cultivate good things to life. At least with their minds, such as to make mind peaceful, to think about good things or meditate, and can also learn from illness, considering illness as a teaching tool to see the truth of life clearly that life is impermanent, suffering and none-self. Many, who see such truth can relieve the pain, live their life with pain without distress, seeing it as nature of life.<sup>10</sup>

The story of suicide appeared during the Buddha time, it is said that the Buddha once preached monks how to practice ‘Asubha Meditation’ Dfoulessness meditation to consider the body as unbeautiful to delete perception on beauty of body, not attach to the beautyfulness and to see things as they really are. After that then the Buddha a lone went aside to the forest. Half a month he stayed right there to practice meditation, only a monk who look after him on alms food authorized. Among monk who practiced foulness meditation, some become bored in life with clearly seeing the body was full of disgusting things. Thus, some have killed themselves; some employed other monks to kill themselves. Some groups of monk have hired lay man to kill themselves; bowl and robe are prized to them. Many monks have been killed therein. When the Buddha left his meditation, he found that there were fewer monks; he inquired then known the monks died due to boredom in their body had committed suicide; employed others to kill themselves. The Buddha blamed such act very seriously. Thus, the discipline on killing others was laid down, those monks who kill others break the third *Pārājika* rule, who kill one’s self violate *tukkata* offense. Suicide which associated with defilement mind bares a heavy kamma, there must be reborn in unhappy life.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Abhidhammatthasamgahatika, (Thai), **Kammacatukka-maranuppatticatukka**, Part 5, Vol. II, (Bangkok: MCU press, 2534), P. 84.

<sup>10</sup> Baisan Visalo, (Thai), **Mercy Killing**: A Buddhist Dimension, (Online), source: <http://visalo.org/columnInterview/5409Image.htm>, 7 August, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> I.B. Horner, **The Book of The Discipline**, (London: Pali Text Society, 1982), pp. 116-126.

## Is Suicide a Crisis or an Opportunity of Being Free from Suffering?

Nowadays it is found that people who encounter severe suffering could not solve their life problems; therefore, it causes him or her serious stress, sadness, depression, sometimes anger, hatred, high pressure. They then plan to escape from trouble which is facing at that moment by suicide with the understanding that such suicide can make them free from suffering. It seems that such an action occurs while their mind is depressed; there is a feeling of resentment over life. According to Buddhist principles, it would be considered that the condition before death the mind arises with desire (*tanha*), which it strongly wishes to escape from the oppressive pressure. That *tañh* would be called ‘*Vibhavatañh*’, which means no desire to live their life because they could not withstand the problem or suffering. Therefore, with a moment of sad mind occurs while committing suicide and finally dead he or she will take a rebirth in woeful world.

In addition, result of death while the mind is covered by defilement throughout a moment of mind or of which decides to suicide; namely, 1) thinking to kill 2) attempt to kill and 3) death with such attempt. Human beings must receive the result of kamma, taking rebirth in the next world that is full of suffering. So it may say in brief, suicide of any person is difficult to escape the triple round of life; round of defilement, round of kamma and round of results. Due to each of human beings are covered their mental state by defilement in various aspects and of which exists within the human mind push them to escape troubles or crises that come through in life. They are not able to accept the truth (because of defilement), which occurs, then take decision to end the problem by committing suicide. The result of taking decision to kill themselves of those whose mind covered by defilement will be born in woeful spheres.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, the escape from the problem by way of committing suicide does not really solve the problem or escape the suffering. Because of life does not end just to commit suicide, but after death, life must continue. Suicide is just the end of today’s human life when it’s gone; one has to be reborn in new world, changing from the human world into woeful world. Naturally human loves one’s life, to kill even himself/herself indicates that their mind at that time is very sad. When the mind is sad at moment of death the place where to go is woeful sphere. Suicide is extremely sinful, which its kammic result will bear fruition

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<sup>12</sup> **The Analysis on Parajika** (four heavy offences): **A Sin from Suicide**, source: <https://th.wikisource.org/wiki>, 20 October 2016.

to those who committing suicide takes birth in suffering places. As this reason, therefore suicide is not a means or good opportunity to be free from suffering. But it is a crisis of life after death that must be repaid in the terrible suffering in hell inescapably.

## The Value of Being a Man

As the Buddha said ‘*Kiccho manussapati labho*’<sup>13</sup> to be born as a human is so difficult. How difficult? Its difficulty is when one already dies will conventionally return to humanity again is too difficult. He again added “Monks! Sentient beings that have died from the human world will be born again as a human are less whereas sentient beings that were dead from human world taken to hell, to hungry ghost as well as to the beast are more, or even were dead from human will be born as a deity are too less, whereas will be born in hell, in hungry ghost and the beast are more.” From such passage it cleared that being born as a human is much more difficult. Otherwise by the nature of human and animal all loves to live, fears to die. As the Buddhist proverb says ‘*Natthi attasamam pemam*’<sup>14</sup> ‘Sentient beings usually love oneself more than other’. Therefore, they wish to have longer life than other. When faced with life problems, they find the way out of life with suicide or use death as the last answer in solving life problems.

The Buddha taught all worlds being to see the value of being human is the most. He preached the value of humanity which was so difficult to gain. He told the world being when defilement (*kilesa*) is not completely annihilated must be circulated to birth and death again endlessly both are born in a good world as well as in miserable land along with their own kamma inevitably. If for those who still have defilement but their mind has been trained well they will go to be born in the happy landscape, such as the human world, etc. if their mind is not trained to refine, they will go to take rebirth in the low world have much suffer in that landscape. Lord Buddha because of His virtue of great compassion preached sermon to world beings, to understand and respect to value of humanity because being born as a human must have accumulated much merit.

Buddhism has reflected human values and the importance of life because being human is harder than other. The Buddha has given simile as a blind turtle swimming in the ocean, for a 100 year will appear once. In the ocean, there is a loop that floats in the

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<sup>13</sup> **KhA.** (Thai) 6/99.

<sup>14</sup> **S.S.** (Thai) 15/29/9.

ocean with strong tides blow to the north, sometime to the south, sometime to the east and sometime to the west, a blind turtle, which in 100 years will appear for a while. Having appeared, a chance to put turtle head into loop at a single channel is difficult to be. The chance of being a human is more difficult.<sup>15</sup>

From the Buddhist perspective it found that if defilement is not uprooted yet human life still remains in the circle of birth of death, goes along with cause of life to be born in other plane. Being a human is really difficult even in today world human are many in number, but the number of human remains less than other living being in this world. If we compare to animals, such as ant, white ant, prawn, shell, crap, fish and so on in this world it may say that human's ratio is still seen less than those animals. If a question is put why are not, we born as those animals? According to Buddhist point of view the answer is we, humans have made good merit, much accumulated perfection, so we have taken rebirth as human beings in which our mind were high developed and have more wonderful chances. Especially opportunity to cultivate virtue, perfection as well as to have more beautiful life as other animals cannot have. Therefore, while we are human beings we should be proud of being a man, because being a man is so difficult do not waste a chance or time we have to look after our short human life with observing five precepts, training mind with concentration and wisdom to completely end circle of birth and death or to stop being reborn in animal kingdom or unhappiness world.

## Conclusion

Suicide, according to the Buddhist perspective, is one type of desire (*taṇhā*), and it is a strong desire to escape from the oppression of life. This desire is called 'Vibhavataṇhā'; 'Desire for Non-Being'. A person who has this desire strongly cannot cope with serious troubles in their life and wants to suicide. If they do so, they get reborn in any of the four woeful worlds. As the Buddha said '*Citte samkilitthe duggati pātikamkha*' 'Sad mind brings one to be born in an unhappy place'.

Therefore, committing suicide is not the right way to solve the problems or escape from suffering. It is not the way of wise people because it does not lead to an end to problems – in fact it, suicide leads to further suffering in the next life. Killing oneself

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<sup>15</sup> Phramaha Uthai Bhurimedhi, (Thai), **Longer to Be a Man**, (Nonthaburi: Pimwara Press, 2557), P. 17-20.

is only the temporary end of a sad and unfortunate human life in the present. One who commits suicide must be reborn in a new world, and the transition from the human realm into another less fortunate realm comes about because committing suicide is a sin. Humans usually love their lives more than other beings, and people who are driven to suicide may be doing so because their minds are heavily defiled. Suicide with a strongly defiled mind is especially unwholesome, and the result of such a suicide is reborn in a realm of dire suffering. Thus, suicide is not some ideal or ultimate choice that people may make, nor is it a wonderful chance to escape from a suffering-filled existence. It is an unwise step that some choose to make during the crises that they face in life.

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