

[Let's Talk About Suicide](#)

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Let's Talk About Suicide

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This is definitely something that we have to discuss, as the percentages are too high to ignore the problem that exists in far too many Hindu communities. The subject is suicide. Well, we can advise, as many elders do - Don't kill yourself. (After all, they became elders by avoiding such extreme solutions.) Suicide does not solve problems. It only magnifies future problems in the antarloka (the subtle, nonphysical world we live in before we incarnate) and in the next life. But do those who are all wrought up with emotion and confusion listen to such advice? No. Many die needlessly at their own hand. How selfish. How sad. But it is happening every day.

Suicide only accelerates the intensity of karma, bringing a series of immediate lesser births and requiring several lives for the soul to return to the exact evolutionary point that existed at the moment of suicide, at which time the still-existing karmic entanglement must again be faced and resolved. Thus turns the slow wheel of samsara. To gain a fine birth, one must live according to the natural laws of dharma and live out the karma in this life positively and fully.

Perhaps this will help. It is my dictionary explanation of suicide - the Hindu way. A "how to" look at suicide, if you please. Yes, there is a time and a place for everything, even suicide, and Hinduism is as accommodating as a five-star hotel. Here is a formal Hindu definition. See if you like it.

Suicide: Pranatyaga, "Abandoning life force." Intentionally ending one's own life through poisoning, drowning, burning, jumping, shooting, etc. Suicide has traditionally been condemned in Hindu scripture because, being an abrupt escape from life, it creates unseemly karma to face in the future. However, in cases of

terminal disease or great disability, religious self-willed death through fasting - prayopavesa - is permitted. The person making such a decision declares it publicly, which allows for community regulation and distinguishes the act from suicide performed privately in traumatic emotional states of anguish and despair. Ancient lawgivers cite various stipulations: 1) inability to perform normal bodily purification; 2) death appears imminent or the condition is so bad that life's pleasures are nil; 3) the action must be done under community regulation. The gradual nature of prayopavesa is a key factor distinguishing it from sudden suicide, svadehaghata, for it allows time for the individual to settle all differences with others, to ponder life and draw close to God, as well as for loved ones to oversee the person's gradual exit from the physical world. In the ideal, highly ritualised practice, one begins by obtaining forgiveness and giving forgiveness. Next a formal vow, mahavrata-marana, "great vow of death," is given to one's guru, following a full discussion of all karmas of this life, especially fully and openly confessing one's wrongdoings. Thereafter, attention is to be focused on scripture and the guru's noble teachings. Meditation on the innermost, immortal Self becomes the full focus as one gradually abstains from food. At the very end, as the soul releases itself from the body, the sacred mantra is repeated as instructed by the preceptor.

Hinduism is not absolutely black and white. Rather, it takes into account the broader picture: How will this affect the soul? How will it affect humanity? How will it affect future incarnations? All that must be taken into account if a wise and compassionate, a right, decision is to be made on so serious a matter. There are very few extraordinary exceptions in which self-willed death is permitted. It is not enough that we are unhappy, disappointed, going through a temporary anguish such as loss of loved ones, or some physical injury or personal loss. That is called life, and it is strengthening for the soul to endure such experiences. It is not enough that we are filled with sorrow or suffering some illness, one of the thousands that beset human beings on this planet. None of these is enough to justify suicide, and thus it is an ignoble act.

But in their love, their wisdom of the meaning and purpose of life, the rishis, the divine lawmakers, provided an alternative for extraordinary human suffering. They knew that suffering for its own sake with no possible end in view is not conducive to spiritual progress. So, in rare circumstances, they gave the anguished embodied soul a way to systematically, nobly and acceptably, even to loved ones, release itself from embodiment. They knew, too, that life is more than a body, that the soul is immortal, that a proper exit can, in fact, be elevating. Death for Hindus is the most exalted human experience - a grand and important departure called maliaprasthana in Sanskrit. To leave the body in the right frame of mind, in the right consciousness, through the highest possible chakra is a key to spiritual progress. The seers did not want unrelenting pain and hopelessness to be the only

possibilities facing a soul whose body was failing, whose only experience was pain without reprieve. So they devised a kindly way, a reasonable way for those, especially the elderly and the terminally diseased, to choose release. What a wonderful wisdom. No killer drugs, no violence, no involvement of another human being, with all the karmic entanglements that inevitably produces. No pain, no sudden or impulsive decision - instead, a quiet, slow, natural exit from the body, coupled with spiritual practices, with mantras and tantras, with scriptural readings, with joyous release, recognition and support from friends and relations.

Now we can see that we must live through life's patterns. When concerned parents want young ones to excel in their studies and you are not able to fulfill these expectations, don't kill yourself. If you keep on failing, just keep going, and eventually you will prevail. Prayers to our Great Lord Ganesha can help with such matters as this.

When loved ones leave or a divorce is imminent, killing the body is not the way. Actually, it is against the law of most lands to even try. If you are young and not at all ill, then Hinduism does not permit it either. Just realize that what you are experiencing is what you justly deserve because you gave it out abundantly in a former birth. Live on. Don't die. With abortion flourishing (which is also, by the way, against Hindu Dharma except to save the life of the mother) good bodies are hard to get. In Hinduism the only rigid rule is wisdom.

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