



## Buddhist Wisdom for Reducing Mental Suffering and Improving Mental Health During the COVID-19

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Article History	Abstract
Received: 01 June 2023 Revised: 07 Aug 2023 Accepted: 27 Aug 2023	<i>In the midst of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Pandemic, people around the world are full of many physical and mental suffering. Physical suffering includes sickness and death caused by COVID-19, and some difficulties such as lack of food and drinks to consume; mental suffering includes worry, anxiety, and stress caused by fear of COVID-19 infection. The ways of people life are not the same as usual; they have to adjust themselves and make a good planning in order to survive in this most difficult time. People need to find the ways to create happiness and peace into their lives. Buddhism can provide the best solutions to those who seek for mental happiness and peace. The purposes of this article were to present the meaning of suffering in Buddhist perspective, Buddhist wisdom for reducing mental suffering and improving mental health, the four noble truths for solving mental suffering, the threefold characteristics for improving wisdom, the four foundations of mindfulness for improving mental health, and the model of Buddhist wisdom for improving mental health.</i>
CC License CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0	<b>Keywords:</b> <i>Buddhist wisdom, mental suffering, mental health, stress reduction, COVID-19</i>

### 1. Introduction

People are now experiencing the epidemic of the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which started in the end of the year 2019, and still keeps continuing with no expected ending. This is considered as one of the human tragedies in the world history. Now it is reported that around 199.56 million of people were infected and around 4.24 million died from the COVID-19 (Thairath.co.th, August 4, 2021). During the outbreak of the COVID-19, people around the world are facing with physical suffering caused directly by this pandemic; some are infected and passed away; some are under the serious medical treatment. When a number of infected people are increasing rapidly, government responsible agencies for medical treatment are fail to heal sick people. The existing medical facilitations of the government which are limited cannot accept a large amount of COVID-19 infected people (Channuwong & Ruksat, 2022). Moreover, each field medical center is full of infected people. So, many infected people have to take care of and heal the disease themselves by just temporarily receiving medical advice from a doctor. Channuwong et al. (2018) found that usually, human beings always experience mental suffering in their daily life because they are conditioned to the global changes which increase many problems such as family, financial, economic, political and social problems. Even though people are very satisfied with the sophisticated technologies such as car, telephone, computers, and many other electronic devices leading to convenience in transportation and communication, but, in many ways, it has been proven that technological advancement can provide people only with physical facilitations, but cannot create real happiness and peace into human life. Therefore, it can be concluded that technological advancement is not the main factor that can improve the ability of people to live with real peace and happiness. According to Department of Mental Health (2014), 45% of working adults are full of mental suffering in daily life. Mental suffering undermines happiness, pleasure and contentment of people. It also has a negative effect on

the well-being, physical and mental health of the people, and reduces work performance and productivity. Now it is reported that more than 39 million of Thai populations are working adults. If they are free from stress and mental suffering, they can create productivity to the country and are able to create a well balance between work and family life in the most appropriate way.

The current epidemic of the COVID-19 pandemic has increased more stress and suffering into human life. This pandemic affects the whole life circle of human beings; it has negative impact on human life such as infection and death. Moreover, it also has a serious impact on economic condition because people have to close their business; they cannot easily contact and trade among each other. In this matter, Buddhism provides the useful ways to overcome these problems. Buddhism teaches that if we cannot change the external situations which are beyond our control, we should change our perspectives not to be affected by those situations. This is enough to find happiness and peace within our mind. Shaku et al. (2014) and Scott (2018) described that Buddhism provides many useful ways to cope with mental suffering. Buddhism teaches people to be aware of the present moment, and focus on the activity they are performing. This is called mindfulness meditation which everyone can practice in daily life. Being mindful with the present activity and movement enable practitioners to control their mind and to void negative feeling that is the cause of stress and suffering.

In Mahāsatipatthāna Sutta (Setting up of mindfulness), the Buddha taught his disciples about Four Foundations of Mindfulness that “The one and only path leading to the purification of beings, to passing far beyond grief and lamentation, to the dying-out of ill and misery, to the attainment of right method, to the realization of Nirvana, is that of the fourfold setting up of mindfulness.” (D.M.11/290/327, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya, 1996; Kaviratana, 1980). People can follow the Four Foundations of Mindfulness to create meditation and mindfulness. There are four kinds of benefits which people can achieve from meditation i.e. happiness in the current life, vision of the truth through insight wisdom, completion of mindfulness and consciousness, and cessation of mental defilement (A. Ch. 21/41/57, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya, 1996).

In the situation of COVID-19 pandemic, the world populations suffer a lot from its outbreak, which its ending cannot be anticipated. The government in each country is trying to find ways to help people survive from this pandemic. In healing physical suffering, medical agencies have produced the vaccine to stimulate the immune system of the human body to prevent the virus infection and to stop its outbreak. Some medicines are employed to heal and treat the infected people. On the other hand, many people around the world are facing mental suffering caused by the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. There is no responsible agency to heal and recover mental suffering of the victims. However, Buddhism as the religion that prioritizes resolving mental suffering can be the best alternative in this moment. Even though physical suffering cannot be avoided, but mental suffering can be eliminated. A therapy of mental suffering in Buddhism started from applying wisdom to get insight into real nature of life. According to Buddhism, human life is comprised of five aggregates namely: Corporeality, sensation, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. Clinging to these five aggregates with attachment that they belong to us, they are our own, may lead to increase more mental suffering because these five aggregates are under to rule of threefold characteristics: Impermanence, suffering and non-self. People with understanding like this will apply the four foundations of mindfulness to eliminate the causes of mental suffering such as stress, anxiety, worry, nervousness, frustration and depression. The purpose of this article was to provide useful directions to people in order to create their mental strength to resolve mental suffering with insightful wisdom.

Purposes of the Study; (1) To study the meaning of suffering in Buddhism; (2) To study the four noble truths for solving mental suffering; (3) To study the threefold characteristics for improving wisdom; (4) To study the four foundations of mindfulness for improving mental health.

This is a documentary research. The researchers applied qualitative research methodology in conducting this research. The collected data are mainly derived the books, texts, research articles and academic articles related to Buddhist teachings. The research conduct consisted of the following steps; (1) The researchers discovered the Buddhist teachings related to suffering, the causes of suffering, cessation of suffering and practical ways that can be implemented to eliminate suffering from primary sources, consisting of Tripitaka, edition of Mahamakut Buddhist University (1982), and

Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (1996); (2) The researchers also collected data related to suffering, causes of suffering, and how to improve mental health from secondary sources consisting of books, texts, journals, and academic and research articles; (3) After data were collected from both primary and secondary sources, the researchers analyzed, synthesized and presented them in the form of descriptive analysis.

## **2. Methods**

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## **3. Results and Discussion**

In this section, the researchers presented the meaning of suffering in Buddhism, the four noble truths for solving mental suffering, the threefold characteristics for improving wisdom, and the four foundations of mindfulness for improving mental health.

### **The Meaning of Suffering in Buddhist Perspective**

Suffering whether physical or mental is inevitable in human life. People are conditioned to face with both sufferings anytime. Therefore, Buddhism teaches about suffering order to find the way to the cessation of suffering. The ultimate goal of Buddhism is to attain nirvana, the state of being peaceful, and free from the circle of birth, old age, pain, and death. In Buddhist perspective, the circle of life is full of suffering and adversity. It can be said that to live means to suffer because everything in the world is not perfect. During our lifetime, we have to endure physical suffering such as pain, sickness, injury, old age and death. We have to endure psychological suffering such as stress, sadness, fear, disappointment and depression (Channuwong et al., 2022). According to Buddhism, there are two kinds of suffering or adversity that human beings have to experience; (1) *Kāyika-dukkha*: Physical suffering or bodily pain. This kind of suffering is general to everyone; it is an avoidable adversity. It comes with our body since the first time that human beings are born in this world. This suffering includes old age, pain, hunger, disease, injury, physical burnout, and death. As long as human beings are alive, they have to face such suffering at any given time; (2) *Cetasika-dukkha*: Mental suffering or spiritual suffering. This kind of suffering is created when facing unsatisfied events like feeling of disappointment, anger, fear, pressure, worry and anxiety. This suffering can also be called temporary suffering because it happens when human mind is predominated by negative emotions and feeling caused from many unsatisfactory events (D.M. 10/295/342, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya, 1996; Phra Brahmaganabhorn, P.A. Payutto, 2015).

Physical suffering is a natural phenomenon, which causes from sickness, pain, injury and disease that occur in our life and is hard to prevent. However, mental suffering occurs more frequently than physical suffering. In this matter, the Buddha said in *Apatha Sutta* that “Monks,

There are two kinds of diseases: Physical disease and mental disease. There exist human beings who confirm that they do not have physical disease during one year, two, three, four, five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, and hundred years. But none of human beings who confirm no mental disease even a moment. It is hard to find human beings who are free from mental disease except those whose mental defilements have been eliminated and uprooted (Arahants)”

(Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya, 1996). In this sutta, the Buddha suggested monks to prevent and heal mental suffering through practicing the four foundations of mindfulness.

In Buddhism, suffering arises from craving (Tanhā). In order to cope with suffering effectively, one should try to control and eliminate craving. If the root of craving still exists, suffering is what one expects to happen. The Buddha has stated in Sutta-pitaka, Khuddaka-nikaya: “Just as a tree when cut down sprouts up again if the root remains firm and uninjured, even so this suffering (of life) returns again and again if the root of craving is not completely destroyed” (Khu.Dh. 43/34/266, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya, 1996; Kaviratna, 1980). Craving is the cause of suffering, which has its origin from ignorance (Avijjā) as the main root of conditioned arising of all things (Paticca-samuppāda) or dependent origination. In Paticca-samuppādasutta, the Buddha said:

“Dependent on ignorance arise karma-formations (Avijjā-paccayāsankhāra). Dependent on karma-formations arises consciousness (Sankhāra-paccayāvinnānam). Dependent on consciousness arise mind and matter (Vinnānam-paccayāna-m-rupam). Dependent on mind and matter arise the six sense-bases (Nāma-rupam-paccayā-salāyatanam). Dependent on the six sense-bases arises contact (Salāyatanam-paccayā-phasso). Dependent on contact arises feeling (Phassa-paccayā-vedanā). Dependent on feeling arises craving (Vedanā-paccayā-tanhā). Dependent on craving arises clinging (Tanhā-paccayā-upādānam). Dependent on clinging arises process of becoming (Upādānam-paccayā-bhavo). Dependent on process of becoming arises birth (Bhava-paccayā-jati). Dependent on birth arise decay and death; there also arise sorrow, lamentation, suffering, grief and despair. Thus, arises this whole mass of suffering (Jati-paccayā-jarā-maranam, sokaparidevadukhadomanassupāyāsasambhavanti) (S.N. 26/1/1-2, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya, 1996; Phra Brahmaganabhorn, P.A. Payutto, 2015).

According to Buddhism, everything whether mental or physical happens in accordance with laws and conditions; and if it were otherwise, chaos and blind chance would reign. But such a thing is impossible and contradicts all laws of thinking (Nyānatiloka, 1970).

The complete cessation of stress and other sufferings can be achieved only if their causes, especially ignorance and craving are absolutely eliminated. Phra Brahmaganabhorn, (P.A. Payutto) (2015) explained that the process of dependent origination (Paticca-samuppāda) is a round circle, which has no origin and end. It started from an ignorance, karma-formations, consciousness, mind and matter, six sense-bases, contact, feeling, craving, clinging, process of becoming, birth decay and death (Figure 1).

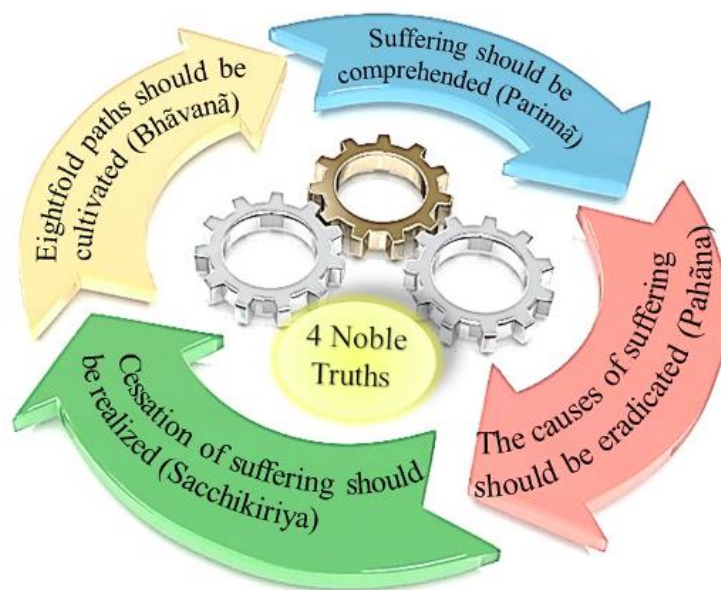


**Figure 1:** The Circle of Dependent Origination (Paticca-samuppāda)



### The Four Noble Truths for Solving Mental Suffering

The four noble truths are the main teachings of the Buddha. They are scientific teachings of the Buddha, with priority on the causes and results of all things. According to Buddhism, everything has its own cause; if its cause comes to an end, its result can be ceased. In order to cope with suffering effectively, human beings should understand the principles of the four noble truths which are consisted of: 1. Dukkha: suffering, un-satisfactoriness; 2. Dukkhasamudaya: the causes of suffering; 3. Dukkha-nirodha: cessation of suffering, extinction of suffering; and 4. Dukkha-nirodha-gāmini-patipadā: the paths leading to the cessation of suffering that are the eightfold paths. The eightfold paths leading to the end of suffering are consisted of right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right meditation (Channuwong et al., 2018). Suffering should be comprehended. The causes of suffering should be eradicated, eliminated and avoided. Cessation of suffering should be realized. The paths leading to the cessation of suffering should be cultivated (Phra Brahmaganabhorn (P.A. Payutto), 2015) (Figure 2).



**Figure 2:** The Four Noble Truths for the Cessation of Mental Suffering

### The Threefold Characteristics for Improving Wisdom

The threefold characteristics are the reality of the natures and the rules that control the conditions of all things in the world. Everything in the world is conditioned to these three rules:

(1) Impermanence. Everything in the world is changing all the time and not permanent. It naturally changes by itself without someone forcing it. Some are dramatically changed which are easy to be observed, but some are gradually changed which are difficult to be seen and observed. The Buddha said in Anguttarnikaya Tikanipata that “Sappe Sankārā Anicā - all conditioned things are impermanent.” The steadiness and un-moveableness are full of changes and movement all the time, but people cannot see their complicated motions. All changes come from uncontrollable factors (Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya, 1996). Therefore, the Buddha teaches his disciples not to cling and attach to the impermanent things which are the causes of mental suffering. What the Buddha taught is just to realize the reality as it is and release our clinging and attachment on it. By this way, our mind will be free from mental suffering.

(2) Suffering. Suffering means everything in the world has to be broken and come to the end; it cannot exist forever even the world we live in. Suffering can be separated into two aspects: Physical aspect and spiritual aspect. For physical aspect, it means that all conditioned things are full of suffering and hard to endure forever. Things that are formed by factors will be broken and come to an end because

those factors are not permanent and changing all the time. In the spiritual aspect, this means mental suffering which may occur from worry, anxiety, stress, disappointment and depression. However, mental suffering itself is under the condition of change as they occur, exist and come to an end. Therefore, the Buddha said that “Sappe Sankhā Dukkhā - all conditioned things are full of suffering” (Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya, 1996). Channuwong et al. (2022) stated that for healthy persons, bodily suffering rarely happens to them. However, all human beings face with mental suffering more frequently than bodily suffering because mental suffering is hard to prevent and they require sharp and deep wisdom to realize the causes of suffering and eliminate them.

(3) Non-selfness. Everything in the world, when separated, is non-self. It is suitable for clinging and attachment. We do not belong to someone and some does not belong to us. We occupy the properties only in a temporary period, and eventually we have to be separated. Thus, the Buddha said that “Sappe Dhammā Anattā – all conditioned things are non-self (Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya, 1996). It can be said that things that we cling to and attach to are uncontrollable, and are not subject to our desire and willingness because they are formed by impermanence and suffering. Learning to understand that things are non-self can help to release our clinging and attachment from all uncontrollable things and attain relinquishment, which is the way to the cessation of mental suffering.

### **The Four Foundations of Mindfulness for Improving Mental Health**

The Four foundations of mindfulness are considered as the most important Buddha’s teachings which lead to attain enlightenment. Attaining enlightenment means all sufferings are absolutely eradicated. The four foundations of mindfulness consisted of 1. Kāyānupassanā (Mindfulness of the body); 2. Vedanānupassanā (Mindfulness of feeling); 3. Cittānupassanā (Mindfulness of the mind); and 4. Dhammānupassanā (Mindfulness of the truth of life) (Phra Brahmaganabhorn (P.A. Payutto) 2015).

With regard to the four foundations of mindfulness for preventing and healing the COVID-19, the researchers would like to present the following methods: Being mindful with the four bases of mindfulness i.e. body, feeling, mind and the truth of life (Dharma) can help a person to concentrate and be aware of the present moment. Knowing the present moment helps to increase awareness and alertness to avoid the risky activities of COVID-19 infection. Moreover, having mindfulness by contemplating on breathing in and breathing out and current bodily movement will help to relax the body and mind in the situations of the current pressure caused by the COVID-19. During the outbreak of this pandemic, many people are stressful because they have to strictly obey and follow the COVID-19 Prevention Standards issued and controlled by the government. The examples of these rules are that people are prohibited to go outside their residences in some periods of time; they are not allowed to wander into some risky places; they cannot perform some activities with crowded people; in some cases, they are controlled in the state quarantine. These prevention standards can lead to increase physical stress, which cause muscle tension, headaches and abnormal blood circulation. By focusing on breathing, it can help to reduce physical tension and improve the body to have more relaxation, adjustment, refreshment and to be getting rid of headache.

Being mindful with joyful thought and positive feeling will help to improve emotion to be good, happy and cheerful. Nowadays, too much consumption of news about people infected by the COVID-19 may lead to increase depression, sadness and stress to the public; it is the same as an accumulation of a poison into the emotion, which can cause negative feeling. This negative feeling can cause mental and emotional conflict, worry and stress. Later on, it will cause negative side effects on both mind and body. So, being mindful with positive feeling is very important to increase optimism and mental relaxation.

Being mindful with the mind can improve the mind to be stable and unshaken with both negative and positive emotions that he or she is experiencing. The situations of the COVID-19 pandemic can cause the mind to be worried, shaken and vacillated with unsatisfactory events, which result in suffering, worry and stress. Learning how to control the mind to stop receiving external negative emotions and to maintain mental stability in Buddhism is considered as the best way to reduce mental suffering, to create mental adjustment and increase mental happiness and peace.

Being mindful with the truth of nature that everything is under the rule of the threefold characteristics: impermanence, suffering and non-selfness can help to release an attachment on the occurring phenomena. We need to realize that the epidemic of the COVID-19 is under this universal rule; it occurs, exists at one period of time and has its ending. Knowing this reality and being patient with this difficult situation can help to strengthen the mind to be stronger and survive from this pandemic. According to Buddhism, everything in the world is uncontrollable, especially the natural phenomena. When the COVID-19 is one of the natural phenomena, it is very hard to control and force it into the expected direction. In this matter, the Buddha taught his disciples to develop wisdom to cope with this problem. People are encouraged to find the methods to prevent the infection of the COVID-19 and stop its breakout. On the other, they have to understand more about the reality of the nature as it occurs based on its causes and conditions. Realizing that everything in the world is impermanent, full of suffering and non-self, can help to increase insight and wisdom to avoid from clinging, to eliminate mental suffering and to increase mental happiness (Channuwong & Ruksat, 2022).

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness, when cultivated and made much of, bring the seven factors of awakening to fulfillment. The seven factors of awakening consisting of mindfulness, truth investigation, effort, rapture, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity, when cultivated and made much of, bring knowledge and liberation to fulfillment (Vijjā and vimutti). Obtaining knowledge and liberation leads to the extinction of suffering and stress (Pali Text Society, 2013).

The four foundations of mindfulness, especially mindfulness of the body focusing on breathing can be implemented to create positive feeling as this kind of meditation can increase positive impact, refreshment, and mental relaxation to practitioner in itself. As mentioned in Ānāpānasatisutta, when contemplating on the body by focusing on breathing in and breathing out, pleasure, rapture, calmness, tranquility and equanimity will arise. On the other hand, mental happiness can be achieved through eliminating the five hindrances (Nivarana) that are 1. Kāmachanda: sensual desire, 2. Byāpāda: illwill; hatred; revenge, 3. Thina-middha: sloth and torpor, 4. Uddhacca-kukkucca: distraction and remorse; flurry and worry; restlessness and anxiety. 5. Vicikicchā: doubt; uncertainty; ambiguity (A.P. 22/51/72, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya, 1996; PhraBrahmagunaborn, P.A. Payutto, 2015). Phra Prasertsak Rattanayano and Phrakrubhavanabhodhikhun (2017) found that there are three stages of mindfulness fulfillment to end suffering: 1) Developing the temporary mindfulness in the current moment—that is to realize that everything in the world is impermanent, and not suitable for clinging and attachment. Everything happens, lasts for a moment, and then comes to an end by its nature. Moreover, one should create positive thinking toward the experiencing problems, and be optimistic and cheerful. 2) Developing continuous mindfulness in daily life: When waking up in the early morning one should make the mind happy and joyful, and realize the consumption of five objects i.e. food, climate, building, emotion, and exercise with mindfulness. This is the way to increase physical and mental health. One should be conscious in all four body movements: Standing, walking, sitting, and lying, and should not allow the mind to wander outside the current activities. By this way, it can stop the mind from worry and anxiety, which can lead to eliminate the causes of suffering. 3) Developing profound mindfulness: This is to realize the four bases of mindfulness training: a) training the mind to realize the body in different activities; b) training the mind to realize the occurring worry, anxiety, and other negative emotions that lead to create stress; c) training the mind to be in good quality, to have strength, stability, and purity; d) training the mind to understand and accept the truth, to be optimistic, happy, and to relax at the midst of difficult situations and problems.

Upon fulfillment and completion of Buddhist principles, practitioners will be able to achieve liberation from suffering. There are five kinds of liberation or deliverance (vimutti) in Buddhism, starting from the worldly liberation to the transcendental one, which can be presented as follows:

Vikkhambhana-vimutti: Liberation from suffering by suppression. This means that some practitioners while entering either temporary or deep meditation, can suppress mental suffering by that state of meditation. This is the first state of liberation which can be achieved through meditation practice, and with the mental power gained from meditation, the causes of suffering are temporarily suppressed. However, mental suffering can occur again when practitioners leave meditation; they need to practice

meditation very frequently in order to suppress the causes of suffering. This is also called “temporary extinction of stress and suffering by suppression.”

**Tadanga-vimutti:** Liberation from suffering by substitution of opposites. This is also a kind of temporary liberation from mental suffering by applying Dharma that is the opponent to the causes of suffering, for example, practitioners may try to eliminate self-attachment by realizing and recognizing that everything in the world is non-self. When separated, human body is just a thing that is composed of four elements i.e. earth, water, wind, and fire; nothing can be said “his or her self” at all because it is non-self. However, this liberation is also temporary, not a permanent one. Each practitioner needs to practice meditation and improve more wisdom to achieve a higher state of liberation.

**Samuccheda-vimutti:** Liberation from suffering by cutting off or extirpation. This liberation is transcendental, which means practitioner can liberate himself or herself from mental suffering by absolute eradication according to each level of supramundane states (Lokuttaradhamma) that one has achieved. This is a complete extinction of suffering because one can extirpate the causes of mental suffering absolutely.

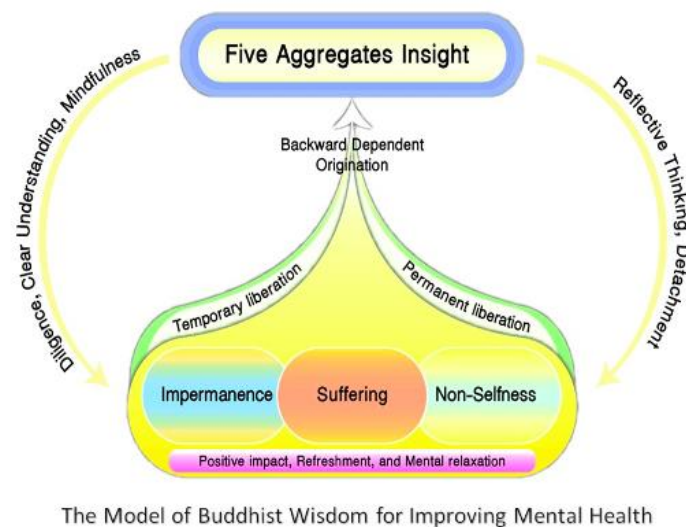
**Patipassaddhi-vimutti:** Liberation from suffering by tranquilization or mind power. Practitioners can apply the attained supramundane state to eliminate greed, anger, and delusion that are the causes of mental suffering, and then suffering is absolutely tranquilized. He or she is not required to practice for more extinction of stress and suffering because they are already eliminated and extirpated.

**Nissarana-vimutti:** Liberation from suffering by escape; liberation by getting freed. Some practitioners entirely eliminate and abandon an impurity of mind, an action causing impurity, an evil side of human nature. They have reached the eternal peace and serenity, and are able to maintain the purity and eternal peace of mind. All mental defilements, unwholesome thought and lustful desires that are the causes of mental impurity are absolutely relinquished, this is called “liberation by escaping or relinquishing” (Phra Brahmagunabhorn, (P.A. Payutto), 2015).

### **New Body of Knowledge**

Based on the research findings, the researchers have obtained the new body of knowledge as follows: An insight into suffering caused by clinging to the five aggregates consisting of corporeality, sensation, perception, mental formations, and consciousness means clearly realizing and understanding various conditions of suffering as they are. A cultivation of wisdom to realize that mental suffering is caused by attachment and clinging to the five aggregates is called “suffering insight.” Having diligence, clear understanding and mindfulness is the process of eradicating the origins of mental suffering which are pleasure and unpleasure with the five aggregates. Reflective thinking and detachment are also the processes of eradicating the origins of mental suffering. These two Dharmic processes, if cultivated and made much of, lead to an insight into the truth hidden behind all corporeality and phenomena that are the threefold characteristics consisting of impermanence, suffering and non-self of things. An insight into the natural truth like this will have a great positive impact on reducing mental suffering. It helps a person to increase an adjustment to new life system, and joyful and peaceful mind. The aforementioned processes can be implemented to reduce mental suffering from much to be least, and from least to be none at both temporary and permanent liberation level, leading to the processes of mindfulness of backward dependent origination. The processes of backward dependent origination are the extinct side of the dependent origination, which can be contemplated to relinquish attachment and clinging to the five aggregates in order to relieve mental suffering and increase mental happiness in accordance with Buddhist teachings (Figure 3).





**Figure 3:** The Model of Buddhist Wisdom for Improving Mental Health

#### 4. Conclusion

During the epidemic of the COVID-19, people are facing both physical and mental suffering. People need to find the way to improve physical and mental health. In order to avoid an infection of this pandemic, we need to strictly follow the following rules: Being aware and understanding of COVID-19, avoidance and prevention of the causes of COVID-19, setting goals in prevention and treatment of COVID-19, and following appropriate ways in prevention and treatment of COVID-19 such as wearing mask, social distancing, avoidance of going to crowded places, and strengthening the mind (Phrakhrusripariyativitan, 2020). In Buddhist perspective, people are conditioned to experience suffering, whether physical or mental suffering. Physical suffering includes birth, old age, pain, injury, sickness and death. Mental suffering includes stress, sadness, fear, disappointment and depression. In order to increase mental well-being, one should train the mind to be steady, pure and peaceful and not to be affected by unsatisfactory events when those are in contact with eyes, ears, noses, tongue, body and mind. One needs to realize that everything in the world is conditioned to the threefold characteristics consisting of impermanence, suffering and non-self. So, everything in the world is not suitable for clinging and attachment (Channuwong & Ruksat, 2022).

Buddhist wisdom to reduce mental suffering and improve mental health in this study are consisted of the four noble truths, understanding the threefold characteristics and the four foundations of mindfulness. The four noble truths are consisted of suffering that should be comprehended; the causes of suffering that should be eradicated and eliminated; the cessation of suffering that should be realized, and the paths leading to the cessation of suffering that should be followed or developed. The four foundations of mindfulness are consisted of mindfulness of the body, mindfulness of feeling, mindfulness of the mind, and mindfulness of the truth of life. When practicing the four foundations of mindfulness, practitioners will be full of mindfulness in each bodily and mental movement, which allows their mind to enter deep tranquility. When tranquility arises, joy, rapture, and inner happiness will arise, which allow practitioners to eradicate all causes of suffering. When the causes of suffering are eradicated, suffering will be automatically eliminated. Upon fulfillment of the four noble truths, understanding the threefold characteristics and the four foundations of mindfulness, practitioners will be able to attain five kinds of liberation or deliverance based on their perseverance, merit and perfection. The five kinds of liberation include liberation from suffering by suppression, liberation from suffering by substitution of the opposite Dhamma, liberation from suffering by cutting off or extirpation, liberation from suffering by tranquilization, and liberation from suffering by escaping or getting freed. The first two liberations are called “temporary liberation”, whereas, the latter three liberations are called “permanent liberation.” Because Buddhism teaches people to understand and

realize the present moment and find the ways to cope with the current problems with wisdom, awareness and mindfulness, human beings can apply the aforementioned Buddhist wisdom to cope with the current problems of the COVID-19 pandemic in order to increase mental well-being and happiness at the midst of difficult situations.

### Recommendations

1. Buddhist wisdom is very much important for people to improve their physical and mental health; each educational institution should educate people about Buddhist wisdom and encourage employees to practice in daily life and in the workplace in order to increase happiness and work performance.
2. Each organization should set up policy for employees to implement the Buddhist teachings in order to increase mental happiness and mental capability to work for great achievement.
3. There should be future research on a comparative study on suffering reduction and happiness creation of people in each organization after practicing the Buddhist wisdom.

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